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IS IT FOR EVER?

VOL. III.

IS IT FOR EVER?

A Nobel.

BY

KATE MAINWARING.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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IS IT FOR EVER ?

CHAPTER I.

MISERY.

O waly, waly, but love is bonny,
A little time while it is new,
And when 'tis auld it waxeth cauld,
And fades away like morning dew.
Oh ! wherefore should I busk my head ?
Or wherefore should I kame my hair ?
For my true love has me forsook,
And says he'll never love me mair.

Anon.

AND it *was* Lucy !
Lucy as young and, fair-looking as
when we saw her in the misery of her despair
clinging to Richard Leslie in Eastham
churchyard, and in her perfect faith
and trust imploring him to save her

from a hateful marriage with Joe Simmonds.

But what was her misery then, or what would her life-long misery have been, even had Richard failed to help her, compared to the extremity of misery and anguish she was suffering now—now, when she knew herself to be forsaken—now, when she had seen him, whom she loved with a perfect, all-absorbing love, forswearing himself so cruelly? It was a terrible blow to bear, and one that had very nearly snapped her life-thread asunder, as it swept so crushingly over her; and God only knew whether it would not take her life yet, or, worse still, send her mad!

But the cab in which she and Susan sat kept on its way, and Susan, in her fear and pity, was shedding tears; but Lucy took no heed of them—no heed of anything. She sat immoveable; her hands clasped tightly together, and her eyes fixed in their glassy look of staring horror. Was she thinking, or had her thoughts stood still, and her mind become concentrated on one point, beyond which it refused to be moved? Over and over again

Susan looked at her sadly, or strove to take her hand and so comfort her, or rouse into life her stricken energies; but all in vain. Lucy never felt the gentle touch, or, if she did feel it, she did not respond to it; she only sat on as though turned into stone, and long before the cab reached St. John's Wood, Susan's thoughts had once more shaped themselves into the whisper of, "She is mad, really and indeed mad."

In vain Susan looked when she reached home for her mother's cheery face peeping over the parlour blind; it was nowhere visible; and in fear and trepidation she helped Lucy out. But there was no reason for fear, no need of her mother's help, for Lucy was still passive, and allowed Susan to lead her whither she willed, and she did lead her quietly to her room, where leaving her she fled below for her mother.

Mrs. Harmon, Susan's mother, was a shrewd woman, not easily frightened nor imposed upon, and she listened without a word, or even gesture of surprise, at Susan's hasty statement.

"Oh, mother! me and Mrs. Wright

have been to see that grand wedding, and have come home, and oh, mother! such a time as I've had of it, for she've gone clean out of her mind!"

"Fudge!" answered Mrs. Harmon.

But all the same she gave to the maid-of-all-work the saucepan containing part of poor Lucy's dinner, and prepared to accompany her daughter upstairs.

This was a work of no little difficulty to Mrs. Harmon, seeing she was excessively stout; so she had to rest now and then, and cough to get her breath, as well as listen to Susan's oft-repeated statements as to how she would find her lodger gone clean mad.

"Well, where's the use of making such a rumpus about it? If she's mad she'll have to turn out neck and crop," said Mrs. Harmon.

After which determined assertion Susan was silent, until her mother stood before Lucy's door and knocked.

"Where's the use of that, mother?" said she; "the poor lady can't heed it," and she turned the handle softly, and entered, closely followed by Mrs. Harmon.

Poor Lucy ! What a pitiable object she looked. Her face pale and bloodless, her large blue eyes wide open, and fixed, and her forehead drawn together, giving an expression of anguish inconceivable, and her small fair hands still clasped tightly, as though thus she was mechanically and unknowingly striving to quench or still her agony.

Mrs. Harmon's resolve of being quit of her melted away. Surely such a look as was on Lucy's face must have softened any heart, even the most callous ; and Mrs. Harmon, on the impulse of the moment, drew near, and laid her large hand on her shoulder.

“ My dear lady ! ” said she.

But Lucy never heeded ; she was lost to all human sympathy, and never moved nor changed her position, nor drooped those fixed, wide-open eyes.

They chafed her hands and forehead, and forced brandy through the clenched teeth, and, lastly, brought her baby, a beautiful boy of some ten months, to her side ; but all to no purpose, Lucy remained in the same stony state, and could not be

roused to look on her boy, and baby cried and hid his face when they strove to place him in her lap.

“ ’Tis quite and entirely beyond me,” said Mrs. Harmon; “and I’m of opinion we’d best get the poor lady to bed, and send for the doctor.”

“And now, Susan,” said Mrs. Harmon, as they sat awaiting the doctor, “let’s hear how it all happened; you’ll have to give an account, you know, of however she came in this state.”

“I’m sure,” returned the tearful Susan, “I’m as innocent as a baby unborn, and if I was to talk for ever such a time I could never tell how it took her. I’m sure I’ve been that scared I shall never forget it.”

“Did she faint off?”

“No, poor lady, she never lost her senses at all — that is to say,” said Susan, correcting herself, “not that way.”

“Was she violent?” inquired Mrs. Harmon.

“No, as gentle as any lamb. It come upon her all of a sudden, and her face all

drawn up, same way as you see it now, and her hands as stiff as anything."

"Perhaps it's a fit?" suggested Mrs. Harmon.

"Lord no, mother! Why she never lost the use of her feet, and walked as orderly as may be up to the place where all the grand company was, right in amongst 'em almost, and me in that tremble I could have dropped."

"Where was the grand company?"

"Where? Why close up before the altar where the bride and groom was, and all the bridesmaids—such beauties!—and the clergyman telling the service. She didn't stay there long, for an old gentleman took her by the arm, and told everybody as she was mad, and I was glad enough to say so too, I did feel that ashamed and terrified taking her down the aisle, and everybody whispering and staring. There, mother, if she gets over this, I don't mean to have no more outings with her."

"Get over it! Why of course she'll get over it. Hasn't she got a baby? Young mothers with a baby don't die off

so quiet as that ; they make a kick for it, I can tell you. Why as soon as ever her senses begin to come she'll begin to think of the child, and of what's to become of him, and, I'll be bound to say, she'll get well ; but it'll be a weary time of it first."

The doctor, fortunately for Lucy, was one whose mind might suggest the cause of an illness such as Lucy's, but who kept his own counsel about it, and, although he questioned and cross-questioned Susan, and quietly allowed Mrs. Harmon to draw any conclusions from it that she pleased, yet he himself neither agreed nor disagreed with her. The lady was simply, he said, suffering from some severe mental shock, but what that shock was no one but herself could know.

"There is a child, you say? She is very young ; surely not a widow?" and he took Lucy's small hand in his, and looked half in doubt at the wedding-ring.

"A widow !" exclaimed Mrs. Harmon ; "law bless you, sir, no ! That is to say, not as I know of. Mr. Wright, a fine,

well-spoken young man he was, came and took the lodgings one day over-night. He wanted, he said, a quiet, respectable home for his lady during the time as he was abroad, and he was quite taken up with mine, and took them straight off, giving one month's advance, which is my custom when gentlefolks don't bring no recommendation. Mrs. Wright, he told me, was very quiet and inoffensive, and so I've found her; haven't we, Susan? The baby cries more than it ought, but that's his teeth worrit him, as none knows better than me, as 'ave been a mother myself, and Susan one of the most trying of babies."

"How long did Mr. Wright remain?"

"Here? Why of course he never came at all. It was an understood thing that I was to look after his wife and child for him, till he comed back. She've been here about a fortnight, and crying her eyes out most of the time, poor lady, and looking out as regular as possible for the postman; but where's the use when she tells Susan that she can't have no letter for over a month; but still I suppose she

likes to look at the one as is to bring her comfort.”

“Does she go out much?”

“She’ve been too unhappy, I take it, to go out. For as to *much*, until to-day I don’t think she’ve been outside the door. But Susan met Mary Dempsey yesterday, as works for Madame Devvy, and she up and told her all about the grand wedding they’d been working for, and when my girl takes in the tea last night she told Mrs. Wright all about it, and I never was so put about when she comed down and told me she was going along with Mrs. Wright to see it this morning. I don’t approve of girls going gallawanting to weddings. But Susan wouldn’t list no ways to me, and I can’t say I’m sorry she’ve been paid out for it.”

“Well, well. It won’t happen again, I dare say. Keep my patient very quiet. I’ll call in again by-and-bye, when she wakes.”

“There’s no anxiety of course, sir. You see it’s come rather awkward, and me not knowing any of her friends. There’s the letter as she’s expecting, poor dear, and——”

“She’ll be well enough to read it when it comes. Don’t worry her with needless questions. Let her get well in her own way, for she *will* get well. But she’ll have a weary time of it.”

“Ah! sir, that’s what I was saying to Susan. We’ve a deal on our hands yet.”

“Not a bit of it. She’ll fight it out without your help,” said he with a sigh, “fight it out as many a woman has done before her. But she’s young, very young.”

And Mrs. Harmon thought he was gone, but he was back again once more.

“By-the-bye, whose wedding, Susan, was it that you went to see?”

“Miss—Miss—I’m sure, sir, I forget.”

“Ah, well, never mind; I shall see it in the *Times*.”

And the good doctor did see it in the *Times*.

But there were two marriages recorded there as having taken place on the same day, at St. George’s, and more singular still, two Miss Eltons.

Which was the right one?

The doctor was at fault, and secretly nettled. But after all, what did it signify

to him? Even if he knew which was the right one, how would it help or benefit poor, gentle, sorrowing heart-broken Mrs. Wright?

The getting well was indeed a weary time to Lucy. She came back to life very slowly and quietly, without an impatient word to those around her, and not a murmur against him who had done her foul wrong, a wrong such as some women would have hunted him to the death for. She moved more hearts than Susan's to pity; she so young, so lovely, and so stricken. What was her sorrow? The old doctor sighed and shook his head ominously when he ruminated upon it, and Mrs. Harmon strove in vain to put away the thought that somehow would creep upon her, that perhaps after all, notwithstanding the wedding-ring on her finger, her lodger was not a married woman, and that the sense of her misery had flashed upon her terribly at the sight of the wedding she and Susan had been to see. But these thoughts, vexing as they were, Mrs. Harmon kept to herself; for hers was such a respectable house,

and a surmise of this sort proving true, might ruin her.

And Lucy lived on, not knowing that her secret was very nearly seeing the light, or perhaps she would have shrunk away abashed from them all. The sad expression of her face grew sadder still, but its soft beauty remained unaltered. Her eyes were not sunk with constant weeping, for, save the passion of tears that had come upon her when baby had once more clasped his arms round her neck, she had shed none; her grief, her anguish, her horror, were too deep for idle tears. She could live—she would live, for her boy's sake; but she would suffer in silence. So she resolutely shut her heart against dwelling on or recalling the dreadful past. Let it go! and would to God her misery could have gone with it! But that was ever with her; she felt it, though she strove not to think of it. She knew it was with her, because her thoughts never pictured the future. They only lived the present, and that tortured her, but she suffered and bore it. Lucy wanted to get well; yet she failed to summon strength to struggle

for it. She was coming back to life slowly—very slowly—too slowly for all she had to do; for Lucy had determined on leaving her kind friends the Harmons, and hiding herself and her boy from that cruel one, who she never doubted would come to seek them. And what if she failed to have the strength to enable her to elude him? It was this fear, perhaps, that kept back her strength, and yet to one of Lucy's gentle, loving, trusting nature the shock was such that it was a wonder it had not sapped her life blood. But when most she wearied of life, thoughts of her boy would come crowding to her heart and make it wail forth, that however bitter her anguish, yet for his sake she must covet life; for how could she leave her baby alone in a world which had proved so miserable a one to his mother.

The days wore on, and by-and-bye came a time when the old doctor ceased to visit Lucy, and both Mrs. Harmon and Susan allowed her latitude of doing pretty much as she pleased, and seldom interrupted her privacy. Then Lucy began to feel the sense of her loneliness, and with it a craving

for action. She longed to be up and doing; longed for excitement of some sort to lull or deaden the fearful weight on her heart; but the time for action had not come, could not come until her promised letter reached her. The days were interminable, as hour after hour, unable to settle herself to anything, she watched for the postman; and when he had passed her window even then there was still hope, for he might bring her letter on his next round; so there was more waiting, more watching, more feverish anxiety; but not one single doubt but that she would get her letter at last.

Lucy never doubted *that*. Her nature was not one to doubt; no, though she had been shamefully, cruelly deceived, and her trust gone, yet she could not bring herself to doubt Richard's love for her. He loved her and would come to seek her as he had said; and God save her from the cruel pang of seeing him, and upbraiding him with his treachery!

Morning, noon, and evening Lucy sat quietly by the window, waiting and watching; and anyone to have seen her face

would have wondered at its sad, earnest, anxious look; and yet for weeks her watching was vain. At length came a day, the day so long expected, when the postman's rap smote her ear, and next Susan's voice lightly humming to herself as she brought—so she thought—in the shape of a letter with a foreign postmark, what was better to their lodger than all the medicine and sympathy in the world.

Very white was Lucy's face as her fingers closed over it, and its look checked all the kind words that Susan had thought to say, and with scarcely a word, save some casual ones regarding the beauty of the day, Susan left Mrs. Wright to herself.

And whiter still grew Lucy's face, and dimmer and dimmer grew the objects her eyes rested on, until they faded completely from her vision; and with scarcely a sigh she lost all consciousness of what was passing around her.

It was dark when she came out of that dead faint, and the sense of weakness was so strong that she dared not make an effort to move lest the faintness should come upon her again. So she sat in her

woeful misery thinking, not of the past, but of the present; the present in the shape of the letter she had in her lap; and her heart sickened when she thought of opening it, and seeing the loving words she knew would meet her eyes. Yet long as she sat thinking she never formed the idea of destroying her letter; it was—half-unconsciously to herself—too near her heart for that. No. She would put it by in some safe place where she could get it any time, and yet where it could not continually meet her eyes, and stab her.

Very little sleep had Lucy that night; she coveted it, longed to steep her senses into forgetfulness, but could not; for her fears were alive and tormenting her, lest with the early dawn should come Richard Leslie. He had said he should not write until he was on the eve of returning to her; and what if the morrow's sun should rise and he be at her side? But the morning came and past, and with it no Richard Leslie, and before noon Lucy had left her lodgings, and bidden adieu to her kind friends the Harmons.

Susan had been sorrowful enough, and had even shed a few tears; but Mrs. Harmon felt a great weight off her mind, as, taking the number of the cab for fear of accidents, she proceeded to hang her card of "Apartments to Let" in the front window of her respectable house, and thanked heaven that her lodger had not only gone off quietly and without a scene, but that she had paid her every farthing she had ventured to demand.

"Shut to the door, Susan," cried she; "there's a regular draught straight a-coming on to my rheumatic shoulder. 'Tis a good job she's gone; not that I've anything spiteful to say again' her. She's more to be pitied than abused, poor soul! There don't stand looking at me that way, go and set the rooms to rights; please God we'll soon have a score of folks a-knocking to see the apartments; and now I think of it, just see that 'Liza left the teaspoon behind she used to feed the baby with, I never gave it a thought till this minute."

"Yes, mother."

“And, Susan, she didn’t tell you where to she was going?”

“Who? Mrs. Wright? No.”

“Nor you didn’t hear tell what she said to cabby?”

“Yes, she said Regent Street.”

“Refuge for the destitute,” muttered Mrs. Harmon.

“Refuge for what, mother?”

“For the destitute. That’s where they all goes when they wants to lose their-selves. But there’s ’tectives, and ’quiry offices, and they’re sure to be raked up again. Well, thank the Lord, Susan, for all His mercies, and ’specially that she’s gone, and gone quiet.”

“I shan’t thank the Lord for no such a thing. She was the sweetest lady I ever come across, and I’m right down sorry she’s gone,” replied Susan, indignantly.

“You’re a foolish girl,” returned Mrs. Harmon, as taking some tablets from her pocket she wrote down, “Number 2104,” the number of the cab in which Lucy had just driven away to Regent Street.

“There ain’t no need to write Regent Street,” said she; “cabby’ll tell fast

enough where he druv her to beyond that."

And she proceeded to fetch duster and broom, and sweep away every vestige of her late lodger, as well as search for, and carefully keep for her own private perusal, any scraps of paper that contained writing.

CHAPTER II.

TRUTH WILL OUT.

Take the token, 'tis but small,
 Blurr'd with ink and scratch'd with pen,
 Yet there's light within the scroll ;—
 Death erewhile—now life agen.

From the Spanish.

FOR the last few months Joe had been in the Crimea.

So much has been said and written about the war in the Crimea, that it is needless for me to touch upon it here. The remembrance of it still lives in every heart, and will live for years to come; but while, at this time of my story, so many in England were losing their nearest and dearest, and eyes were weeping and hearts were crushed, Joe in his search for that death which so many deplored had not found it. Foremost in action, ready for any work, and distinguished and known amongst his

officers for his cool and determined bravery, Joe had, in the never-to-be-forgotten battle of Inkerman, been returned as severely wounded, as also gazetted—for some distinguished piece of service—an ensign.

This was glorious news for Eastham, and fired so many youths' hearts, that even Jacob Ernslye desperately declared, during one of Betsy's fierce moods, when she had been very hard upon him and tried his love to the utmost, that he didn't care if he never saw his forge again, or followed in Joe's footsteps, for there were more hearts than his that coveted death.

Joe's promotion had happened in November, just as Anne Campbell had gone back to Eastham, nine months ago; and this was August, and fresh news was looked for now—news of the fall of Sebastopol. Would Joe come scathless out of that? There were many hearts in Eastham that thought of him, and wished him well, and foremost amongst the number was Miss Gathorne's. She was inwardly proud of Samson's doings and Samson's promotion: he had distinguished himself as she always knew he would if only he had the

opportunity; and the opportunity had been given him, and he had not let it slip by, but had done more than even her highest flights of imagination had pictured. So far so well. And yet it was not well; for mingled with this pride for Joe was a feeling of vexation, akin to shame, that her nephew Richard Leslie had not only not distinguished himself, but had lost any future chance he might have had of doing so by selling out of the army shortly before his marriage. Was this Anna's doings? for if so, Miss Gathorne felt as though the kindly feeling she had always had for her was fast creeping out of her heart, and a feeling akin to irritation succeeding it. Why had Richard married her? This was a question easily but not satisfactorily answered; for, when Miss Gathorne would have readily argued, "because he loved her," her heart somehow smote her, and Bridget's bold avowal of "Never, ma'am, for love!" would come across her, and make her sad and out of sorts, and more than out of sorts—unhappy; for never could she think of Richard and Anna without a strange

yearning of the heart for Lucy—Lucy who had lived in her heart for so long—and Lucy whom she dared not in her conscience mourn as dead; and if not dead, then living,—and if living, where—where and how?

“Alas, poor Lucy!” murmured Miss Gathorne sadly, as on this bright August morning she, in a large brown mushroom hat tied under the chin—a recent purchase—and dirty wash-leather gloves, was in the garden picking off the dead leaves and blossoms of her pet geraniums, and gathering together the few stray falling leaves the gardener had carelessly overlooked; and, “Alas, poor Lucy!” she said again, more sorrowfully yet, as she suddenly remembered that just two years ago this very month, almost this very day, Lucy had bidden her that tearful farewell that had indeed parted them for ever.

Involuntarily, and with a sigh, Miss Gathorne took up her basket of dead leaves and blossoms, and went away towards the gate overlooking the mill stream. It was shining like silver brightly and quiveringly as the rays of the sun shone

full upon it. It dazzled Miss Gathorne's eyes, but she did not withdraw them, for her thoughts were very sorrowful all of and with the past. Thought after thought chased each other through her heart; first, of the small, delicate child who had cried and begged to go home, and been so frightened of her; and then of the slight, lovely girl, meek, gentle, and docile to a fault, who had loved her, and whom she had loved and never forgotten—nay, more, never would forget. And never had Lucy seemed nearer to her heart than now, as, leaning over the gate with the pruning scissors in one hand and her small basket in the other, she rested the one on the other, and thought sadly of her *protégée* so mysteriously lost to her, so mourned and lamented. She was rudely interrupted by the sound of coming footsteps.

Some one going to the mill, so she thought; perhaps the miller himself; and “Good-day, Ralph,” she was prepared to say, and no more; for just now she was feeling too sorrowful for conversation.

But it was not Ralph. It was a rough, awkward-looking man, with thick nailed

boots and slouching gait who was approaching her, and who, seeing she was bent on avoiding him, whistled knowingly, and with a cunning leer lurking about the corners of his eyes, the while he beckoned to her to wait.

“Hi!” cried he, softly; “where’s the missus, old girl?”

Miss Gathorne was too much taken by surprise to find any answer. She looked about for Teazle, but unfortunately Teazle was not to be seen.

In the meanwhile the man had come up to the gate, and was leaning over it, just where but now she had been so sorrowfully ruminating about Lucy.

“Well,” he said, “how are yer, and where’s the missus?”

“Which mistress?” inquired Miss Gathorne.

“Which! What’s there more nor one, then? Lord bless us! I should ha’ thought one ’ooman to worrit ’ee wor enough! But if yer’ve gotten two, why, damn it, I don’t no longer wonder ye’re sich an uncommon thin un,—nought but skin an’ bones, as far as I can see.”

"I never was fat," remarked Miss Gathorne, drily; "but, my man, you are not over polite in telling me so," and then she laughed.

"Come," said he; "we'll rub along together nicely, I see. Here's my hand," and he stretched a large, horny, begrimed one across the gate; "take it, if yer like, an' if yer don't like, why, let it alone!"

"Then I'll let it alone, for it's a remarkably dirty one."

"Dirty? Well, it might be a trifle cleaner, an' so might them gloves o' yours, wi' which you've gone and dabbed a beauty-spot just right atop o' your nose, an' that don't improve a body's appearance, let alone a 'ooman's, an' a sex as ought to beat ours all to jabbers, seeing as how they're allays a titivating theirselves afore the looking-glass," said he, with a fresh oath, which almost made Miss Gathorne jump.

"What's your name? and where do you come from? and what do you want?" asked she sternly.

"Now you speak sensible like, an' to

the purpose; an' it's what I've been driving at all the while I've been standing here; but my name, and where I do come from, an' what I do want,—well, I don't mean to tell 'ee," said he, with a hoarse but good-natured laugh.

"Then I shall turn my back upon you, and send out the dog if you don't take yourself off."

"I don't care a damn for your dog. Look here!" and he shook a thick stick at Miss Gathorne; "this'll knock un over, and send his teeth, if he 'as any, down his throat, for I take it the beast is a old un."

"Good-day to you," returned Miss Gathorne, angrily; "next time you speak to a lady just speak in a becoming manner. It's dreadfully wicked to swear."

"It 'ould be to you as never lets drop a oath; but to me, Lor' bless yer, they're as natarel as meat an' drink."

"You ought to be ashamed to say so. Where do you expect to go to when you die?"

"Well, I'll tell 'ee," said he, scratching his head; "I've only half a mind about it, an' when I do get a-thinking about

it I allays prays fervently it'll be a place where 'oomen bides in one half o' it, an' men in t'other; for if they goes there pre-miscuous-like, it 'ont be a place o' rest an' psalm-singing an' rejoicing for Jeremiah Dobbs, devil a bit o' it!"

"Jeremiah Dobbs! So that's your name. Well, Jeremiah, you are a great sinner, and the sooner you turn over a new leaf the better; and leave off swearing, or something dreadful will—no, not will—*may* happen to you."

"Them oaths was taught me by a 'ooman; 'twas her tongue druv me to 'taliat in that way; a 'ooman can't help her tongue, a wolley o' words comes as natarel to her as a drop o' spirits goes down a man's throat—when he can get 'em," added he, with a laugh; "but where's the use of palarvering here? My business is wi' the missus, an' I hope she'll talk as sensible as you do,—an' that's a compliment for 'ee, anyhow. Come, bring I to ha' speech o' the missus."

"If I am not the mistress, who am I then?" asked Miss Gathorne.

“She as is under the missus, o’ course, an’ does all her dirty work, an’ doesn’t forget to eat dry bread afore her face, but lays the butter on thick behind her back.”

“Can he mean Bridget?” thought Miss Gathorne, somewhat staggered at the suspicion arising in her mind against that trusty servant.

“So I’m Bridget, am I?” said she aloud.

“I dare say you be; an’ it don’t much signify who you be so long as you leads I to the missus.”

“Come this way, then. I’ll lead you.”

Jeremiah opened the gate, and readily enough followed Miss Gathorne.

Entering the house, she stopped and pointed to the dirty state of his boots, thick with clay and mud, which all the scraping in the world had not succeeded in removing.

“They are in a filthy state,” she said; “can’t you take them off?”

“In course,” cried Jeremiah; “’tis the easiest thing in the world, if you’ll bide still a bit.”

And while Miss Gathorne took off her

hat and gloves, and laid her scissors and basket on the table in the hall, Jeremiah divested himself of his boots.

“Now then,” said he, “I’m ready. ’Twas a lucky thought o’ yourn, an’ ll spare the servants a deal o’ trouble in sweeping up the dirt after me; an’ if *she’s* a ’ooman o’ tender narves, as they mostly are, these gentlefolks, why I’ll be like a cat a-creeping about the place,—no noise, an’ no dirt, an’, let alone a hole or two about my toes, as decent a looking individle as you’d wish to see.”

Again Miss Gathorne laughed as she preceded him to the drawing-room; and, seating herself in her customary arm-chair, she desired Jeremiah to shut the door and come nearer to her; and, putting on her spectacles, she looked at him from head to foot in her own peculiar fashion for half a minute or so, until Jeremiah began to feel uncomfortable, and more so when, on looking round the room, he saw no other lady present; then the perception began to dawn upon him that perhaps he had made a mistake. What if after all it was the missus herself to whom he had

been speaking? This thought sent the blood coursing rapidly through Jeremiah's veins. But he was not long left in doubt.

"Now," said Miss Gathorne, "you perceive I am the missus herself, and what do you think you deserve for your rude remarks and sinful swearing?"

"Why, then, nothing at all," replied Jeremiah, boldly, "for if as how you'd said straight out you was the missus, devil a bit o' either the one nor t'other you'd ha' had; though I might ha' known when I got alongside o' a 'ooman I should ha' put my foot in it; cos why? I allays do. But I axes yer pardon, ma'am, an' makes bold to say if yer'd stuck to the truth, ye'd never ha' had the truth so plain spoken fro' Jeremiah Dobbs."

"Very well," replied Miss Gathorne, feeling somehow that she was not getting the best of the argument; "very well. And now what do you want with me?"

"You see, ma'am," began Jeremiah, "'tis more nor a year—well, 'tis close upon two year ago sin' it happened; and sin' I've had it on my mind, an' it

troubles me, an' worrits me ; an' I get a-thinking o' it when I shouldn't be a-thinking o' it ; an' latterly I ha' taken to dreaming o' it, an' I feel summut inside o' me a urging o' me to make a clean breast o' it ; so I've come a purpose to do it."

"Very well, I'm glad to hear it. Let me get my work," said Miss Gathorne, "and then I don't care how long your story is, nor how long you take about the telling of it. It's nothing bad, I suppose?"

"Bad! Lord save us, ma'am, no! That is to say, not to my mind."

"And I'll tell you more about mine when I've heard your story. Do not hurry yourself, and don't shuffle about so as you sit—it offends me. And now I think of it, just hide, if you can, those dirty hands of yours, or, at all events, don't hang them over your knees in that way. So—that will do ; and now clear your throat and begin," and bending her eyes on her work, Miss Gathorne commenced plying her needle and thread.

Jeremiah did as he was bidden. He

straightened his body, tucked his hands away up his sleeves, and cleared his throat more than once; but somehow his voice, or his story, failed him, for he sat dumb, and for a moment or so there was silence.

"Now, Jeremiah," exclaimed Miss Gathorne presently, "what are you about? I have finished sewing on this wristband. Come, look sharp! You had plenty of words and oaths but now."

"Ah, ma'am," replied Jeremiah pathetically, "you never said a truer word. I had plenty to say just now; but, you see, you've gone agin they oaths, and, damn it, I can't palaver wi'out 'em!"

"Then I don't care to hear your story, so the sooner you take yourself off the better."

"Patience, patience, ma'am. I'm coming hard an' fast at it, if yer don't be putting in a word here an' there, an' muddling o' me; for if so be as yer do, it's as sure as gospel truth I'll make a mess o' it."

"I won't say a word for a quarter of an hour." And Miss Gathorne pulled out

her watch, and laid it on the table before her.

Once more Jeremiah cleared his throat. "No oaths, ma'am?" said he.

"Not one," answered Miss Gathorne decidedly. "But now I think of it, suppose we compromise the matter. You shall say *dash it*, instead of — you know what I mean?"

"It won't come so natarel like as t'other to I, and I'm terrible afeard I'll forget it. Howsumever, here goes. Well, you see, it wor close upon two year ago sin' I wor a-going, as is my custom, to Northborough wi' some cacklers—fowls, an' ducks, an' such like, as I breeds; when, a-singing an' a-whistling along as lightsome as I allays is when I puts a few miles atween I an' Mrs. Dobbs," said he, with a knowing wink of the eye, which was lost on Miss Gathorne, who did not raise her eyes from her work; "I passed a girl on the road not a mile out o' my home. I looked at her, in coorse, as any man 'ould, an' she wor as sweet a young crittur as any 'un 'ould wish to see; an' somehow she looked at me so soft like,

that I up an' said it wor a fine morning, but the clouds betokened rain, an' if she wor a-going far she'd best hurry it. An' she spoke wi' a voice like a sheep-bell, on'y softer, an' said she wor a-going a long distance, an' if as how I 'ould gi'e her a lift she'd be that grateful, seeing as how she wor in a deal o' trouble, an' wor a-going to seek her husband. Well, that flabbergasted I a bit, seeing as how she looked so young; but there, she talked I over to hide her inside o' the cart. I can't mind for why I wor to hide her; but there, I did hide her, an' we went along as comfortable as could be; an' presently it comed on to rain wi' fury; an' by-an'-bye we comes across another 'ooman—just like my luck—a-seated under a hedge, wringing wet, an' she up an' axes I to gi'e her a lift; an' the girl cries, an' makes a fuss, an' says as I'd a-promised her I'd take up no more; but I thinks different—for you see, ma'am, I've got a marciful heart—and so, like a——" here Jeremiah suddenly halted, and coughed.

"Dashed!" suggested Miss Gathorne, mildly.

“Thank’ee, ma’am. Dashed fool as I wor, I took t’other ’ooman up, an’ made her comfortable and cosy along side o’ I. Well, we gets all safe to Northborough, not wi’out a kind o’ a inkling or a presentiment fro’ the ’ooman—a werry saint she wor, wi’ the Scriptures a-tumbling fro’ her mouth like the feathers off o’ a plucked fowl—that we worn’t the on’y two inside o’ the cart; but I chaffed her a bit, an’ whipped up the old horse, an’ made believe I’d a bad chest, an’ thumped it wi’ my fist, a-hurting myself considerable, an’ all for the sake o’ the young wife a-going arter her husband. Well, we got to the cattle market, and there, thinks I, the Lord be thanked, but I’ll get rid o’ the young ’un. Down I gets, a-making o’ some excuse to the ’ooman, an’ lifts out the girl, an’ points wi’ my finger for her to look sharp an’ be off; but no, she wor a ’ooman, an’ so she began to whisper like; an’ the old un outside gets down to see out o’ curoosity wot was a-going on; an’ the young un gi’es a screech fit to wake the dead, an’ bolts; an’ the old un wor arter her in a second; but I worn’t

a-going to be bamboozled, nor, whether she knowed the young un—which it's my belief now she did—let her come it that strong. So we wrestled, an' a tough customer I found her, an', for a saint, she fought like the werry devil. I thought, by-an'-bye, I'd killed her, but I hadn't, as I found out when I took her to the Crown an' Ball."

"What was she like?" asked Miss Gathorne, stitching away diligently, and scarcely interested in the story.

"She wor big, an' bony, an' thin, wi' a long nose, an' eyes as black as sloes, an' as sharp as any ferrets, an' as wrastless. She wor a cute un, I can tell 'ee, an' no mistake; an' as for her knowledge o' the Bible, I believe she'd beat the minister at it."

This picture was so true to the life that Miss Gathorne could not mistake it. Her work dropped into her lap, and she stared in a mazed kind of way at Jeremiah.

"It was not two years ago," she said, striving to subdue her agitation.

"Well, 'tis close upon it," answered Jeremiah.

Yes, it was close upon it—close upon two years since Anne Campbell had so secretly left Eastham; and yet what had Anne Campbell's going away got to do with her? (Miss Gathorne). But an uneasy feeling possessed her all the same—a feeling that something was wrong somewhere, and that Jeremiah had not had half his say.

“Do you want to know if I can tell you this woman's name?” she asked.

“No ma'am, no. It ain't no consarn o' mine. 'Tisn't that as bothers me. 'Tis that same young 'ooman wi' the sweet-spoken voice, an' the hair like a ripe sheaf o' corn, that worrits I; and yet she wor so innocent-like, that I'm blessed if I can think she wor arter no good. But I can't never forget the cry wi' which she up an' bolted soon as ever she caught sight o' t'other 'ooman; an' 'tis this same cry as makes my conscience afeard that mayhap she knowed that same 'ooman; an' wot if she wor a looking arter her that same time, an' but for I 'ould ha' nabbed her? An' I'm uneasy like about it—werry uneasy; an' can't no ways rest quiet.

Perhaps, unbeknowing-like, I ha' helped on her ruin, or ha' helped to hide her fro' her kinsfolks. An' so, ma'am, wi' all them thoughts about me, I can't settle to nothin'; and so I've made up my mind to make a clean breast o' it altogether."

Miss Gathorne sat motionless. A dim shadowy feeling was creeping over her of ill; her very heart seemed to tremble as "Lucy! Lucy!" nothing but "Lucy!" it seemed to breathe forth with each pulsation. She felt powerless to question Jeremiah—powerless to say a word that might help him on in his story. She could only rest quiet, and struggle hard to suppress all outward emotion, or, at least, so much as should lead Jeremiah to suspect she had any undue interest in his story.

But Jeremiah as yet had not thought at all about Miss Gathorne: he was too much taken up with his story, and the telling of it, to notice anything unusual in either the face or the manner of the lady, who appeared to listen to him so patiently. Since he last spoke he had not even looked at her, but had

half stood up to enable him the better to search in his capacious trousers pockets. He dived his hand into first one and then the other, and presently, with a grunt of satisfaction, took therefrom a small paper parcel, tied round with a string, which he very carefully and slowly unfolded.

“ ’Tain’t any worse nor when I picked ’un up out o’ the straw in the bottom o’ the cart,” he said, half to himself, half to Miss Gathorne; “ ’tain’t new an’ ’tain’t old; but I can’t abear it near me no more; it do seem to accuse I like, an’ so I’ve brought it to yer, ma’am; an’ as it ’ave gotten your name an’ address inside o’ the cover, I can’t be that wrong in handing o’ it over to yer. Perhaps yer’ll call to mind who yer gived it to; for I take it them two letters up at top be the young ’ooman’s as I saw, an’ she being skeered at sight an’ talk o’ t’other ’ooman, dropped it at bottom o’ the cart, an’ that’s how I comed to find it. Anyways, I can’t be wrong handin’ it over to yer;” and, advancing to where Miss Gathorne sat, he gave a small book into her hand.

It was as much as Miss Gathorne could do to steady the hand with which she took the book; and she strove to think, as she dropped it in her lap, that it was not the small volume of hymns she had given Lucy, and which the latter was in the habit of carrying about in her pocket. She felt the necessity there was for an, at least, assumed indifference; but she knew that she was assuming it badly, if, indeed, she had assumed it at all.

She covered the book with her hand as it lay in her lap, to hide it from her sight; but strive as she would she could not help picturing it in her memory. She seemed to see the very pencil marks she had made in it against a particular passage that had struck her fancy long before it had come into Lucy's possession; also the hymn over which she had written the date on which she had given the book to Lucy—a hymn which she wished especially to mark in the girl's memory. Ah! that time long ago! how the recollection of it welled up into her heart, subduing by its strength its throbbings, and making its pulsations a matter

of difficulty. Once more Miss Gathorne leant back in her chair, powerless to help her emotions from becoming all too visible to Jeremiah, supposing he was spying her, or, what might be as likely, set on by another to spy out her secret thoughts. She dared not open the book—dared not until she was alone, and able to let her emotions have full play. Yet Jeremiah had no idea of acting the spy. He had not the remotest suspicion that Lucy, dressed as he had seen her as a simple villager, could be anything akin to the lady before him; and he was merely waiting to know whether Miss Gathorne recognised the book he had brought.

“ ’Tis yourn, ma’am, or was yourn once, ma’am, I take it? ” he said, inquiringly.

“ Yes, yes, ” she answered, hastily; “ it is mine—Lucy’s, I mean; ” and then, aghast at having mentioned Lucy’s name, and perhaps given her questioner a clue, she turned pale and sick at heart.

“ Ah! I thought, ma’am, as how you’d mind the young ’ooman, if so be as yer gived it to her; she worn’t one as yer

could easily forget. Do you mind the trouble she was in?"

"Yes—no—that is, I don't know—I can't tell you."

"I take it her husband wor in trouble, an' 'bliged to hide; for she didn't look as though she could ha' harmed a fly, though she did go so precious sly arter him. Well, I'm right down glad I gi'ed her a lift—that I be. I don't hold to young married folks being miserable an' a separated from one another; it leads to deal o' wickedness at times. She wor just the sort o' a girl to make a man cut his throat for, and then be sorry he wor a-dying an' a-leaving her behind him, like a fool that he wor."

"There—there's ten shillings for you; don't talk any more," replied Miss Gathorne, striving to maintain a semblance of composure.

"Thank'ee, ma'am. I'm sure 'twasn't for the hope o' a reward I comed; I wor that miserable 'cause my mind worn't at ease like. I'll be careful o' the money—that I will."

"I don't care what you do with it;

only don't spend it in drink at *Eastham*. Go—go home at once. You'll promise me?"

"I will, ma'am; and Jeremiah's promise is as good as his oath any day. I'll be off, an' along the road in a twinkle, an'll shut my near eye when I passes the Three Bells, an' you can send some un arter me, an' see if so be I don't. No, no, Jeremiah sticks to his word like a leech on a inflammatory place, same as my missus had when she bruised her shin—on'y she had on more nor a dozen."

"Enough! I—I can't bear any more; I—I'm not well to-day," said Miss Gathorne, feeling she was growing whiter and more incapable of speech every moment; "I'm feeling giddy, and—and in pain."

"I'm truly sorry, ma'am—that I be; for no one knows better nor I do what them same mizzly feelings be. I used to be terrible subject to 'em, 'count o' a *deceased* liver, an' nothing cured I so fast as a antiphibious pill; an' I can recommend it to 'ee wi' confidence. Try 'em, ma'am!—try 'em."

"I will!" and Miss Gathorne pointed to the door. "Now go."

"Yes, ma'am, yes; but before I goes I wishes to ax pardon for——"

"Man, you will drive me mad!" cried Miss Gathorne. "Would you have me turn you out? Go, and leave me—now! at once! this moment! I'm sick of you. Begone!"

"'Citement is bad for 'ee, ma'am—very bad. You'll sort o' excuse my making bold to say so; an' good-day to 'ee, ma'am—good-day."

"Begone!"

"Sartainly; I'd as lief go as stay—damn'd if I 'ouldn't;" and muttering and mumbling to himself, Jeremiah went out chafing at the abrupt, discourteous way in which he had been dismissed.

Miss Gathorne sat quietly on for full ten minutes after Jeremiah had left her; yet she was not thinking of poor Lucy's probable fate, nor of the strange setting at rest of her one doubt—her one fear cherished so long. She was feeling stunned, as it were; incapable of action, incapable of thought. She heard Jere-

miah's indistinct mutterings of displeasure as without, in the passage, he put on his boots. She heard the heavy hob-nailed sound they made as they passed beneath the window across the crisp gravel; and again, the swinging to and fro of the gate, as though it had been left in sullenness to close when and how it liked; and she listened to the clicking of its catch as backwards and forwards the gate swung—listened until the sound grew fainter and fainter, and at length ceased altogether, and there was silence.

For the last half hour the brightness of the morning had been gradually fading. Now the clouds were thick and thunder-laden, throwing a gloom over everything without, and veiling the room, with its drawn blinds, in which Miss Gathorne sat, in semi-darkness. It was then that the door opened and closed, and a tall dark form, shrouded from head to foot in black, walked hastily towards her.

Miss Gathorne shuddered as she recognised Anne Campbell, and her heart crept with fear, and for once she had no sharp words wherewith to do battle.

For a moment Anne stood, and steadily looked at her.

Did she note Miss Gathorne's shrinking form, or the fear with which she regarded her, or the despairing pride that was well-nigh crushing her?

“‘For the sin of their mouth, and for the words of their lips, they shall be taken in their pride,’” said Anne, solemnly.

But Miss Gathorne was speechless.

“Didn't I ask you by the memory of my dead mother and yours? Didn't I ask you in God's holy name to save Lucy, or, if too late to do that, to help to save her from further ruin? Didn't I warn you that the days would come when you'd recall my words to your mind? Remember *then* that I implored in vain. Yes, you must remember it, and remember, too, that my sorrow hadn't no weight with you. Now *you* are sorrowing; and why? Because 'the wages of sin is death'—a death that will weigh heavy on your soul for ever, and be a sore burden for you to bear. I know,” went on Anne, “I know who's been with you but now, for I met him nigh the nursery, and took him

home with me, and he and me have been talking together till now, and I know all that's cutting your soul like a sharp knife, and smothering the words on your tongue. But I haven't, God knows, come to reproach you, nor miscall you, for 'I will keep my mouth, as it were, with a bridle,' hard matter as it may be; but I've come to let you know that I know all this, and to warn your hard heart to turn and repent. Do you see the wickedness which in your pride and stubbornness you've been guilty of? Why hadn't you helped me two years ago? Why did you turn a deaf ear to my anguished prayers? Why? but because you've been an obstinate woman all your life. And this is the end of it, an end that's a shame to you! Where's Lucy? Where? but where your own flesh and blood have cast her! *I* don't need to be told that she's a sin and a shame, a mark and a scorn for all virtuous women; and *you* don't need to be told *now*. *You* know what I knew that time I came to you half crazy with sorrow; you know that Lucy lives, and lives, God help us, in shame!" said Anne, who had

worked herself up into a whirlwind of conflicting emotions.

Still Miss Gathorne did not speak ; she only stared helplessly, and in a kind of frightened way, at Anne, and presently clasped her hands together feebly, but in doing so Anne's eyes lighted on the small hymn-book in her lap.

"Yes," said she, pointing to it ; "yes, I don't need to be told that's hers ; and if there's one thing more nor another that crazes me, it's to think that that same day she dropped it I might have saved her, and didn't. But what's my sorrow to yours, who never lifted a hand to save her, nor snatch her from ruin. And you might ! you might ! But it's too late now, too late for every one. You're stricken with remorse, and that's your punishment, and you must bear it. As for him, that evil one who tempted an innocent girl, and lured her from her home, his punishment's to come ; and it'll come surely, for 'be sure your sin will find you out' ; and for this—this, I watch and wait. Then Lucy 'll be mine once more, and together we'll mingle our tears and our prayers for

God's mercy and forgiveness. But for those who've coldly doomed her to a living death, let them make their peace with God!" said Anne, sternly.

She turned swiftly, and as swiftly as she came, went out. The thunder-clouds had burst, and the rain fell in torrents, but it did not stay Anne's footsteps until a vivid flash of lightning seemed to stream across her path, when with a shudder she halted, for it brought to her recollection that day she had spoken of but now to Miss Gathorne—that day on which the rain had fallen as heavily, the thunder had pealed overhead, and the lightning had flashed as vividly, and she had taken refuge in Jeremiah Dobbs's cart.

And, with a great sob at her heart, Anne hurried homewards.

CHAPTER III.

“THE TARANTELLA.”

Thus, then, dear my daughter,
 In this young person, culling idle flowers,
 You see the peril that attends the maiden
 Who, in her walk through life, yields to temptation,
 And quits the onward path to stray aside,
 Allured by gaudy weeds.

Barker.

AND now Mr. Hill, the doctor, had plenty of work on his hands, for first Miss Gathorne fell ill, with what appeared to be a low nervous fever, and, next, Lady Elton, instead of—as had been previously arranged—joining Anna and her husband at the seaside, came back to Leighlands with the hope—so it was said—of regaining that strength upon which she had so often prided herself, and which for weeks past had been, as it were, gradually ebbing away from her.

So Mr. Hill had, at least, two patients

requiring his almost constant attention; but whereas the former was difficult to manage, being touchy, irritable, and obstinate, grumbling at every fresh bottle of medicine, averring it to be “nastier” than those that had gone before, the other never complained, but seemed content to abide by Mr. Hill’s treatment, however haughtily she bore herself towards him in her weakness. And she was weak—so weak, though without any apparent bodily ailment that might in any way account for it, that Mr. Hill, somewhat baffled, suggested the advisability of obtaining further advice. But this Lady Elton strenuously opposed, and Sir Crosby, ever ready to fall in with his wife’s wishes, mildly coincided with her. Not so Mr. Hill, who sought the first opportunity of being alone with his patient to point out the necessity there was for some material change for the better, urging her to allow him to call in the physician from Northborough.

But Lady Elton at once silenced him.

“There is no necessity for your calling in any medical man; and when I tell you

that before leaving London I consulted the first physician there, and he gave me *no hope*, you will see the folly of tormenting me with any second-rate one from Northborough. I am well aware that you can do me no permanent good, neither can you arrest this weakness which is carrying me to my grave. I know perfectly well that I am dying, and that no earthly power can save me. I am willing to allow you to prescribe for me, and will take your remedies without a murmur. But you know that I am dying, and I know it likewise, and am content."

But was she content? She spoke calmly, and with no apparent agitation, looking Mr. Hill steadily in the face the while; but all the same she could not help the anxious expression of her eyes, which seemed to pierce him through and through, even after she had ceased speaking, as though perhaps hoping against hope that Mr. Hill might, in a measure, contradict her words.

But he did not. His pleasant face looked grave as he gently placed his fingers on her wrist to feel her pulse, thus

obviating the necessity of an answer. Then suggesting that she should have as much air as possible he rose, and in somewhat of a softer voice than usual bade her good-bye.

“And I am as cold as cold can be,” shivered Lady Elton, as the fresh autumn wind blew gently across her from the open window.

“Stir the fire, Josephine,” said she to her maid, who now entered the room; “and give me some warmer wrap. No, don’t close the window; only do as I have said, and then leave me.”

Once alone, Lady Elton wept softly to herself for many minutes. Why should she weep when but now she said she was content to die?

Ah! life is dear to us all, and dearer still when the fear—the certain fear—comes upon us that we are about to lose it; lose it to go we know not whither! There is, be our life long or short, so much left undone that we ought to have done, so much done that we could wish undone, the memory of which torments us in our hours of weakness. Oh! but for

one short year of firm strength wherewith to help to mend the past—that past which is written indelibly on our hearts in such mournful, reproachful characters! Broken promises, sinful shortcomings in our duty to both God and man. If but a few more years were given us, we might employ them in at least attempting to blot out the past, by striving to remedy or atone for it. Strange that, although this feeling and transient wish of atoning for the past has often crossed our minds while in the full vigour of our strength, we have never had an earnest wish about it until now! But this life is a busy life, and the mind is busier still, and ever at work—ever full of ideas, plans, and projects, either not carried out to please us, or neglected until too late to be carried out at all.

Lady Elton had said she was content to die, but “neither the sun nor death can be looked at steadily.” Lady Elton strove hard to do so, and perhaps succeeded in deceiving every one but herself; and herself she could not deceive. Her pride kept her from coveting sympathy; and, besides, who was there she cared to have it from?

Anna was wrapt up in her husband, and seldom even wrote to her ; and Sir Crosby’s sympathy would have driven her wild. Loveless she had lived, and without love, or a loving hand to smooth her pillow, she was likely to die. And yet she had, in her worldliness, foolishly thought wealth would bring her happiness—that happiness of birth and station that she supposed was hers when, years ago, she married a man whom she despised, and never found out her mistake until it was too late to mend it ; but she had revenged her disappointment by trampling on his love, until not a single grain was left to cheer her now, when for the first time in her life she wanted it.

She had made a hard struggle for life ; had fought and battled with her weakness at first with a strength of mind that few would have been capable of. But all in vain. It gained upon her slowly, but all the same surely ; until she felt it was useless to contend with it alone, and she secretly sought the help of one of the best physicians in London, and had calmly demanded his candid opinion, which, how

ever gently it might have been worded, was—death. Perhaps it was a relief to Lady Elton to know the worst, and to cease struggling against a weakness that kept her in a constant fever, and, by the very strength of mind she exerted, exhausted her. When she knew the worst she returned to Leighlands. It was better to die there than in a strange house, where even her wealth brought no loving faces or gentle soothing words. Yet it was better to die amongst old familiar scenes and recollections—to die in the very room in which her child, the only one she had ever had, was born. But it was all fraught with sadness, with an intense longing for what had long been the pain of her heart—the longing for love and tearful sympathy from one who loved her. And this love she had not; and in her bitter sense of loneliness Lady Elton often in secret wept abundantly.

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The eighteenth of September came and went while Miss Gathorne lay grumbling on her bed of sickness, refusing steadfastly to

believe the oft-reiterated assertions of Mr. Hill that she was advancing slowly towards recovery. The fact was she did not care to get well; Jeremiah's terrible news as to Lucy's certain ruin filled her with remorse and horror—horror at her nephew's duplicity, which now she never doubted, and remorse at not having herself obtained some surer help than his in searching Lucy out. These thoughts all through her illness she nursed; storming and scolding by turns those who came near her, and ending these outbursts when alone with secret tears, and worries, and weakness that were decidedly bad for her. Still, notwithstanding her determined wish to the contrary, her constitution was proof against all assaults, weak and strong, that she brought to bear against it; and she grew better, and finally well, long before she consented to leave her bed or believe that she was not dying. But stirring news had reached Eastham, lying remote as it did from the metropolis,—news that was at least some forty-eight hours old; but it was glorious news for all that—news that made many an old heart feel young again,

and old blood momentarily burn afresh with almost youthful fire,—the news of the fall of Sebastopol.

Miss Gathorne's old blood was roused, nay more, she became as excited as she had but now been apathetic. This wonderful news drove Lucy for a time out of her thoughts, or at least gave her a secondary place after Joe, who had again been severely wounded, with the loss of an arm. Here was excitement indeed!—the very excitement she needed. Here was the very man of all others tamed and toned down with all he had passed through, to do her behest wisely and well; for he should be entrusted with Lucy's secret, or so much of it as regarded her fictitious death; and he should be the means of rescuing her from degradation or misery such as it drove Miss Gathorne nearly wild to think of. Of course she must get well! Of course she must gain strength!

She became feverishly impatient for Joe's return. Over and over again she taxed Mr. Hill's patience sorely, by cross-questioning him as to his experiences re-

garding the amputation of arms, and how long a time, or rather how short a time, could elapse before a man might be pronounced convalescent, and able to bear the fatigue of a voyage home. As to the possible chance of any ill happening to Joe, Miss Gathorne scouted the idea or grew angry over it. He *was* to get well, and there was an end of it.

And the news that he *was* well reached Eastham after a time; and then, and not till then, the old church bells were set ringing right joyfully; and a flag fluttered in the wind from the top window of the village inn; and trees were ruthlessly stripped of their branches and woven about the windows of the Eastham cottages; for not only were all these rejoicings in celebration of a splendid victory; but Joe, their old messmate Joe, would soon be on the return home, and surely, if all accounts were true, he had dubbed himself a hero. He had worked his way in spite of all obstacles, in spite of his heavy grief, in spite of his own will, which was on the look out for death, who had mown down mercilessly many brave hearts

as brave as his. Joe had been wounded, —once—twice; and Joe had lost an arm, and this latter fact was spoken of with enthusiasm. All his shortcomings were forgotten, or glossed over, or became as nothing when brought into juxtaposition with his loss of limb. His revengeful temper; his quick, sudden passions seemed things of long ago; while the fact of his terrible, overwhelming grief for Lucy was now pityingly commented on without one dissentient voice.

Betsy Harold alone *seemed* to take things quietly. She pleaded constant headaches as an excuse for not taking her usual walks with Jacob Ernsly, and sat day after day with her work in her lap watching the twining of wreaths and devices and the dragging of branches of trees and evergreens through the village; and when all was completed and the church bells appeared to ring out more merrily than ever, Betsy carried her work up to her room, and with fingers in her ears to shut out the noise, sat down to think.

When would Joe be coming home? Was he on his way? or had he more than

accomplished his journey? and would the next minute find her listening to the tidings that he had come? and, ah! had he forgotten Lucy, or ceased to grieve for her? Would he remember all the passionate words that she, Betsy, had blurted forth in her love and despair on that never-to-be-forgotten day they had last been together? The girl's cheeks flushed painfully at this latter thought, and her heart throbbed quick and fast; until suddenly she remembered that she was more than half promised to Jacob; and then her heart's quick beatings hushed, and her cheeks blanched, and she let her hands fall despairingly in her lap. Love and despair alternately waged war within her; now this and now that had the mastery, and Jacob Ernsly was once more thought of, and now with almost hatred.

But the days passed on and Joe did not come. The old church bells had long ceased their joyful pealing, the last straggler had ceased to hover about the village inn, and only the wreaths and fanciful devices with their drooping withered leaves were left to tell the tale of the merry-making

that had been. Betsy's heart was sick with long deferred hope, and she grew restless and snappish in her fresh disappointment and misery.

Joe shunned her! Yes, the certainty of this had just dawned upon her that morning when she had learnt that his father had started for London to join his son. Oh! the reckless despair and dogged misery of her heart as she walked home!

"Folks might ha' spared their money an' their trouble. Joe won't never come to Eastham no more," said she to her mother, in a tone of voice that sounded as though she had a hard matter to stay her tears.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Harold, "I've heerd that the farmer ha' started to see his son."

"We're all a lot o' ragamuffins in his eyes now—now he's a gentleman," said she, scornfully, "it's a pity Lucy Campbell hadn't a lived, she'd ha' jumped down his throat now, she'd always a hankering after being made a lady of."

"Don't say a word agin the dead, Betsy; don't you be a minding how that

there lord as comed down to stay with them Eltons time ago, was as soft as a baby on her, and 'ould ha' married her too, and been thankful, only she 'ouldn't ha' him."

"I don't want to be 'minded o' nothing at all about her. I hate her—hate her though she's dead, and I'm sorry I didn't see her struggling for her life—that I am!"

"Hush, Betsy! You'd ha' saved her if you had."

"I wouldn't! I'd ha' stood an' looked on! I tell you there ain't nothing she haven't done to rile me. She've made a bad, wicked girl o' me, that she have. There ain't a bit o' good left in me, that there ain't, and I ain't sorry for it, 'cause I sha'n't ha' no remorse for anything I may do;" and Betsy went towards the door of the cottage, and leaning against it stood with flashing eyes and burning cheeks, and passionate feelings swelling her heart. All her old despair had come upon her; all her desperate feelings with regard to her love for Joe. Once more she felt reckless, and worked up to revenge herself somehow. She shivered as she stood,

and the hot, fierce tears came dropping one by one from her burning eyes, yet they gave no ease, but only made her feel how powerless she was to—even with the revenge she meditated—touch Joe's heart, or make him feel a pang of remorse.

“Betsy!” said Mrs. Harold, who had been watching her some time, and although her face was hidden, guessed pretty accurately the feelings that possessed her daughter; “Betsy!” said she again, and going near she laid her hand on her daughter's arm, and tried to draw her gently towards her. But Betsy resisted; she was too stubborn to let her mother see her tears. But Mrs. Harod would not be repulsed.

“Betsy, I won't never believe all you've been saying. You're not so bad nor so wicked as you think. You've had a sorrow, lass; a big sorrow an' trial, an' it's pretty near been a-breaking your heart, an' it's good for you to cry; but, Betsy, come an' cry anearst your mother, whose heart's as sorry as anything for you, an' would help you if she could, only she don't know how to. Let's cry together, Betsy, for I can't

abear to see you like this no more;” and unresistingly this time Mrs. Harold drew her daughter towards her; and the next moment Betsy was sobbing her heart out on her mother’s shoulder.

“There! there!” said Mrs. Harold, soothingly; “them tears’ll do you a world o’ good, an’ wash out all love o’ Joe. You see he’s a gentleman now, Betsy, as you say, an’ he’ll ha’ different thoughts. An’ what’s more, my girl, if Lucy’d ha’ lived he’d ha’ never married her now, for,” said Mrs. Harold in a whisper, “her mother was a light-o’-love.”

Betsy drew herself suddenly from her mother’s arm.

“An’ you’ve never told me so afore. Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Well, ’twas years ago, when you was a baby. An’ it ain’t lucky to say nothing agin’ the dead. An’ then nothing wasn’t known for certain. An’ them Campbells ha’ had a deal o’ trouble. Anne—you know Anne? well I can remember her as handsome a girl an’ as lightsome o’ heart as you’d wish to see. It’s trouble as turned her. She’ve had a deal. Joe’s

father was her sweetheart until all this got about o' her sister, Lucy's mother. They was to have been married at Michaelmas time, and Anne stitching her fingers off nearly, an' a-singing over her work as happy as a lark. An' just afore the wedding was to be her sister comed home, an' Lucy were born, an' the wedding were put off 'cause her sister was so bad, so folks said; but they did be thinking all the while that 'twas strange young Farmer Simmonds wasn't never seen a-coming or going to the Nursery no more. But folks didn't wonder for long; for by-an'-bye he brought a sprack wife fro' Northborough, an' Anne just broke her heart quietly wi'out dying."

"An' Farmer Simmonds ha' never asked her again all these years sin' his wife died?"

"No! never! His bride soon withered away. She died when Joe was born. Perhaps she'd come to know Anne's story, perhaps she hadn't, or forbye the Farmer couldn't help letting her see his love worn't hers. That I don't know nothing at all about."

"What for have you told me all this?" asked Betsy, presently.

"'Cause I want you to see that others is more miserable than you. See all the years Anne's had to carry about her sorrow an' shame. Times over she might ha' married. But she wouldn't, an' I suppose she knew best, but I'm thinking she've had a sorry time o' it, an' folks a-pitying her, an' talking o' her how she have a-nursed o' her love for one who treated her shameful, and harn't cared nothing at all about her for years gone. Lift your head, Betsy, my girl, an' be brave, an' don't let folks be a-putting their heads together to flout you, nor to be a-pitying o' you, or a-saying, 'There goes the girl who wanted to go a sweet-hearting wi' a man as 'ouldn't sweetheart wi' her!' Keep a brave heart, Betsy, an' show folks they harn't got no call to be a-pitying o' you an' a-despising o' you --I would!"

So saying Mrs. Harold went back to her work; and once more Betsy leant idly against the doorway. But the tears no longer fell from her eyes, the large drops

that had gathered glistened in her long dark eyelashes, but she dashed them rudely away and fetched her hat. Mrs. Harold watched her daughter furtively.

"Where beest going, Betsy?" she asked.

"Out," answered Betsy, with a proud determination in the tones of her voice. And with something that sounded very like a sigh Betsy left the cottage, and went her way down the village, leaving Mrs. Harold rather dubious as to whether she had done right in rousing her pride.

By-and-bye when Betsy wended her way homewards there was a triumphant flash in her large eyes, and the old defiant look and manner in her whole bearing. Her dark hair was tied with a bright scarlet ribbon, and her cotton dress pinned up so as to show not only a petticoat of the same hue as the ribbon, but her small feet, which stepped over the ground with the proud walk of a duchess. She passed up the village with a bright flush on her face, and a toss of the head to those she chanced to see, and a curl of the lip that induced

one man at least to turn his head and shake it dubiously.

"She've bin arter no good, and she won't come to no good," muttered he.

But Betsy, if she heard him, heeded him not, but only tossed her head more pertly, and sang, as she was wont to do when on her mettle, in a light trifling way.

"They shan't none o' em think," thought she, "that I'm any way down 'cause o' Joe. I'll show 'em that I scout him an' hate him too! Oh! if I could only see that there old 'Spitfire' I'd rile her, I know I 'ould. I'll ask mother if she don't want no goodies for nobody, that I will; an' then I'll go an' be as meek as any saint afore her, but I'll spite her for all that, an' make her old head shake wi' passion!"

And Betsy sang a livelier air, and putting her shapely arms akimbo, began what seemed very like a dance, nor stopped until fairly out of breath she had danced herself into her mother's cottage, and turned round like a teetotum as a kind of wind up.

But since Betsy's absence "Old Spitfire" (Miss Gathorne) had come to see Mrs.

Harold, and was sitting—looking like an avenging judge at Betsy—just opposite where the girl had made her last pirouette, and now stood laughing at her mother's evident discomfiture.

“Where's your manners, Betsy? Ain't you ashamed o' yoursel'?” asked Mrs. Harold.

But Betsy had dropped her arms to her sides, drooped her long eyelashes, and, as demure as any Quaker, made her meekest, but for all that pertest, curtsy, almost before her mother had done speaking.

“You didn't see the lady?” continued Mrs. Harold, considerably mollified by Betsy's apparent submissiveness. “She've such spirits, ma'am; I know you'll excuse her;” and in a perplexed way she looked from one to the other.

“Is that the last step you've learnt at your merry-makings and fairings, Betsy Harold?” asked Miss Gathorne, severely.

Betsy looked more penitent still.

“Yes, please, ma'am,” answered she.

“Then it's the most shamelessly indelicate one; for, with your gown tucked up in that play-going fashion, I could see

more than your ankles just now, I can tell you! Your petticoat blushes for you, if nothing else does, and will draw all the calves about the village after you. I don't believe you help your mother in any one single way. Scarlet petticoat, indeed! It must have cost a good ten shillings and more, you extravagant slut!”

“Please, ma'am,” said Betsy, “it don't go all the way up;” and, lifting her gown, she showed a black petticoat with a broad bit of scarlet sewn on at the lower part of it.

“More shame to you! that's all I've got to say, making yourself look like a gipsy queen, with nothing but patchwork. Pooh!” said Miss Gathorne, contemptuously.

“Please, ma'am, the lady's maid up to Leighlands give it me, an' I did think 'twas a sin to waste it, that I did! An' sure it isn't no harm having a bit o' scarlet about my legs.”

“No decent girl would talk about her legs, or show them in the scandalous way you have just done. What are you coming to, Betsy Harold?”

Betsy hung her head in pretended shame; but there was a merry look in her eyes, and a scarce concealed smile playing about the corners of her rosy lips.

"Shall I tell you what you are coming to?" pursued Miss Gathorne, severely, thinking that at last she had made an impression on the girl's stubborn heart.

"Please, ma'am, yes."

"You are coming fast to a bad end, if you haven't reached it already. You are no good, Betsy Harold, and you know it."

"No, ma'am, I don't know it," said Betsy, humbly; "I'm a-striving hard to be good, only I can't do what some does,—make pretence at it."

"You are a disgrace to the village," said Miss Gathorne, waxing wroth.

"Don't be too hard on her, ma'am," said Mrs. Harold; "she've got some good in her,—she 'ave indeed."

"Thank you, mother," said Betsy, tearfully.

But Miss Gathorne was not to be appeased. Perhaps she suspected Betsy's show of penitence and humble bearing.

"Good in her!" exclaimed she; "when

she's filled with tricks and her head stuffed full of trumpery nonsense, and her mind running on flimsy, flashing, rubbishing finery ! Look at her with her short petticoats and bits of scarlet make-believe, —why, she looks like a circus wench ! ”

“ Oh, ma'am ! ma'am ! how can you go for to abuse a poor girl like that. I don't know what a circus wench be, that I dont ! ” and Betsy put up her apron to her eyes and commenced sobbing. “ I never heard tell o' such a girl ; and I'm that shamed to think she's a right down bad 'un. Oh my ! oh my ! whatever will Jacob say ! Oh, ma'am, don't go for to tell him I'm a—a—circus—wench ! ” and Betsy's sobs redoubled.

“ I've told you the truth,” replied Miss Gathorne, “ and Jacob would tell you so too if you didn't make a fool of him, and mash all his courage into a jelly.”

“ A—circus—wench ! ” sobbed Betsy again, “ oh, I shan't never forget it, that I shan't. Oh my !—oh !—oh ! ”

“ I'll tell you something to drive it out of your head,—*Lieutenant* Simmonds. Ah ! I thought I should make you jump. Do

you know a *gentleman* of that name? Bestir your brains and think."

"No—o, ma'am." Betsy's sobs were not done.

"I knew I should puzzle you. Why what do you think of Joe Simmonds being a lieutenant,—eh?"

"Nothing at all, ma'am. 'Tain't no concern o' mine;" but the girl's face flushed brightly notwithstanding.

"That's a story, Betsy. You love him,—you know you do!"

"Me, ma'am! me!—oh!——"

"Yes, ma'am, you!" said Miss Gathorne, wrathfully; "you'd soon drop your scarlet rags and dress yourself in black all over from top to toe if he asked it!"

"Well, ma'am! I never should ha' thought you'd ha' been an' gone an' done it," said Betsy, reproachfully.

"Done what?"

"Ha' tempted me to the bad."

"How dare you say that?" exclaimed Miss Gathorne; "it's another story, you bad girl!"

"No, ma'am, it ain't. 'Tis the truth; for you says, 'Betsy,' says you, 'you're

in love wi' a leftenant, an'll make yourself black all over for him.' An' I to be married to Jacob Ernslic come this Christmas," and here Betsy looked shyly at Miss Gathorne, and dropped a humble curtsy. "Yes, ma'am, 'tis truth. I'm to be married to Jacob,—an' you a-tempting o' my head,—which you says is a empty one—wi' th' idea o' being a lady. Ain't 'ticing me to give Jacob the slip by a-tempting a poor girl to the bad?"

"Do you mean to say Jacob is going to make such an ass of himself as to marry you?"

"Yes, ma'am, he is going to make a ass o' himself. Oh, please don't tell him I be like a—a—circus wench!"

"You are an impudent hussy, and Jacob will rue the day that makes you his wife. You'll break his widowed mother's heart, for it is not made of such tough stuff as your mother's here. Best have an eye to the rest of your children, Mrs. Harold,—especially the girls. It's a precious good thing for them that Betsy is going to make herself scarce, though a terrible calamity for Jacob. Good morning to you."

Betsy's eyes were still concealed by her apron, but now she peeped slyly from under one corner of it.

"Tra—la—la—la la la—la!" sang she, as soon as Miss Gathorne was well gone; "I said I'd rile her, an' I've kept my word. Oh my! mother! did you watch her eyes?—they was like old tabby cat's there when the children teazes her—fit to come out o' their lids, when I telled her 'bout me an' Jacob," and once more Betsy put her arms akimbo, and sang and twirled her graceful little body over the sanded floor.

"An' do I show my legs, mother?" asked she; "an' 'ould Jacob be that shocked an' scandalized if he was here an' seen 'em? No he 'ouldn't, I know; 'tis only old 'Spitfire's' jealousy, 'cause hern be such spindle-shanks,—made o' nought but skin an' bone. Look, mother," said she, going to the door; "only look how she tippits over the ground, a-picking out the clean places, wi' her gownd all hanging nohow 'bout her, an' her great coal-scuttle a-top o' her head. My! don't she look a cure! There now, she've

stopped o' purpose to pitch into Sam an' Harry. 'Says she, 'How dare you be a-playing marbles this time o' day? Go home, an' help your poor hard-working mothers, or learn tell o' your letters.' An' on she goes, leaving the boys a-laughing at her behind her back same way as I am," and Betsy made the cottage echo with her wild laughter as she threw herself into a chair.

But Mrs. Harold looked at her sorrowfully.

"I'm a-trying to understand you, Betsy," she said; "but 'tis true I can't."

"Don't 'ee never try to understand me, mother, for you won't; cause why? I don't understand myself."

"Is it true, lass, you ha' promised yoursel' to Jacob Ernslic?"

"As true as you be a-standing there, looking as doleful as though you was thinking about burying o' me."

Mrs. Harold sighed. "You're too fickle, Betsy. You goes from tragedy to comedy, as òld sexton says, an' I'm 'most afeard comedy 'll end in despairful tragedy wi' 'ee."

“Never you fear, mother. You mind the mangle, and teach sister to turn it, for I won’t be long by now. September,” said she, holding up her fingers and counting on them, “September—no, September’s ’most gone,—October—November—December—there, I’ve counted it scores o’ times, ’tis nearly three months. I wonder ’ll the time go quickly?” and Betsy’s face looked almost anguished.

“When didst promise Jacob?” asked Mrs. Harold.

“When? Why most a year ago, if I reckons all the many thoughts I ha’ had since. But t’was only an hour ago. No one shan’t think me lovesick nor love-lorn; an’ I won’t be stitching my fingers to the bone same way Anne Campbell did; nor I won’t ha’ Jacob a-prowling after me all times o’ day. I’ll ha’ my fling o’ thoughts while I can! There, mother, don’t let’s be talking dismals,” said she, suddenly springing up from the chair; “see how lightsome I be!” and this time catching her dress in her fingers, Betsy once more twirled and sang.

“That’s the way I’ll dance at my wed-

ding,” said she; “ an’ if any one’s shocked, let ’em be shocked ! ”

But the old tears were somehow swimming in Betsy’s eyes. So after a moment or so she danced herself away upstairs to her room.

Poor Betsy !

CHAPTER IV.

AT MRS. HARMON'S.

Oh love ! no habitant of earth thou art,—
 An unseen seraph, we believe in thee,—
 A faith whose martyrs are the broken heart,
 But never yet hath seen, nor e'er shall see
 The naked eye thy form, as it should be :
 The mind hath made thee, as it peopled heaven,
 Even with its own desiring phantasy,
 And to a thought such shape and image given,
 As haunts the unquenched soul — parched — wearied —
 wrung—and riven.

Lord Byron.

RICHARD LESLIE did not return to London so soon as he had promised Lucy he would ; but Anna had rendered this impossible by suddenly falling ill, and not only ill, but strangely irritable and morose.

Anna's illness was more of mind than of body. Lucy, of whom she had previously ceased to be jealous—Lucy, whom she had thought dead, was alive ; and of

Lucy Anna thought at first with perplexity, and a certain fear, until she was almost distraught. All Lady Elton's warnings, all her suspicions, all her angry aspersions respecting Richard and Lucy, now seemed to come upon her and strike her with a fear of the possibility of their truth. Lucy alive! Lucy not dead! Then where had she been all this while?—where had she been hiding? Why had she allowed herself to be supposed dead? Ah! why indeed?—save for one reason, that made Anna shiver, as with an ague, from head to foot. But if doubts of her husband's truth swept through her—if he had been to blame with Lucy, was it possible *she* would have gone of her own free will to see him married to Anna? True she had looked pale and sad, but there was no misery such as there ought to have been on her face when Anna had first caught a glimpse of it; and Anna would have subdued her doubts—nay, scorned the dreadful thought of Richard's baseness—but for the second transient glance of Lucy's anguished face, as she had driven away from the door of St.

George's. Could she ever forget the large blue eyes, so fixed in terror and despair?

No ; Anna could not forget them. Day and night she thought of them ; even in her sleep she would cry out in her fear of them, until she sickened with dread, and turned away from her husband with something like fear.

Thus Anna grew really ill ; and, notwithstanding her coldness, Richard nursed her, if not tenderly, at least with unremitting, never flagging patience, until she grew better, and able to talk about the probability of soon returning to England. Yet, though she discussed plans calmly, and showed no visible emotion as the days drew near for their return, yet her heart was in a terribly excited state, for did not England contain Lucy ?—and Lucy she feared with a very great fear, and a jealousy that she had not deemed it possible she possessed. In vain she thought of Richard's words, once so sweet to her, and which had enabled her to refute or proudly bear all her mother's anger and set determination of setting aside her

marriage with Richard—" *I did love Lucy Campbell, but I never trifled with nor deceived her.*" So he had said, and she had fondly believed and trusted him. Oh ! the misery of the thoughts that tormented her !

The nearer she drew to England the more unhappy and morose she grew. Should she reveal to her husband her knowledge that Lucy was not dead, and thus allow him to guess at part of the misery that tormented her ? No ; Anna was too proud for this. He had been silent—supposing always that he was guilty—and *she* would be silent—silent, but watchful. If Lucy was the scheming, artful girl Lady Elton had been so persuaded of, Anna would give her no chance of further deceit. Was she not a wife ; and Richard's wife ? Yes ! and no woman from henceforth should stand between him and her !

Thus Anna thought, as she lay wrapped up in a warm shawl on the deck of the Boulogne steamer, and saw the white cliffs of England becoming more and more distinct ; while every evolution of the steamer's paddles bore her nearer and nearer to

Lucy—to Lucy and the unravelling of Lucy's secret.

Sir Crosby and Lady Elton were to have met Anna at Folkestone, but letters had awaited her in Paris telling of the latter's illness and subsequent departure for Leighlands; and, but for this, Richard would have found a trip to London almost impossible. As it was Anna went with him. It was all the same to her, she said, which way she went to Leighlands; London was decidedly out of the way, but, if he must needs go that route, she would go also. And to London they went.

Once there Richard kept his promise to Lucy, as she never doubted that he would, and went his way to Mrs. Harmon's a day or so after he reached London.

Mrs. Harmon had lodgers, so there was no card of "Apartments to Let" in the window of her respectable house, to tell him the tale of Lucy's flight; and it was with beating heart that he drew near the door, and nerved himself to meet her whom he had so shamefully deceived.

Richard loved Lucy. Yet, loving her as he did, he had found it impossible, in

his selfish heart, to remain true to her. He was not naturally a bad man—that is to say, had things gone well and prosperously with him, and had no reasons for temptation arisen, he would have lived and died, much to his own and every one else's satisfaction, a good man. But he lacked the strength of mind to do battle with what he chose to consider *Fate*; or had allowed his mind to become in such an unhealthy, quiescent state that, though he did not willingly rush upon this *Fate*, yet he made no struggle to resist or turn its sharp point aside, until he had wounded himself past hope of recovery.

There is no such thing as *Fate*. For why should we sit down quietly and drift to the bad, when a strong will, rightly exercised or controlled, would lead us to a foretaste of heaven upon earth? We are too apt to cry out and rail at *Fate*, which is, after all, but a phantom, though nine-tenths of us make it a reality by our own foolish acts. Let us be up and doing, and remember that what we lay at the door of *Fate* ought justly to be ascribed to our own stupid laziness. That alone

drifts us to evil, that alone brings misfortunes, and follies, and all and every mortal calamity upon us; so that, instead of abusing *Fate* for having torn all happiness from us, we should cry shame! shame! upon our lazy, sluggish minds.

“There is no man but may make his paradise,
And it is nothing but his love and dotage
Upon the world’s foul joys that keeps him out on’t.”

Richard’s regiment had been an expensive one, and he deeply in debt, when poor trusting Lucy cast her lot with his. Yet had he confided his difficulties to her all might have been well. But he did not. He gambled and speculated in the vain hope of retrieving himself, and consequently became irretrievably involved—nay, ruined. What was to be done? Miss Gathorne steadfastly refused to open her purse; though had he made known his desperate case, the probability is she might have done so. But, as in Lucy’s case, he lacked the moral courage to do it. What if she disinherited him, and turned him adrift? So he kept silence until poverty and certain exposure stared him in the face; then, rendered well-nigh

desperate, he engaged himself to Anna as the only loophole of escape, the only salvation, so he thought, for himself and Lucy. He realized some money by the sale of his commission; and giving Lucy fifty pounds for present expenses, married Anna, thinking, hoping—his sin would never find him out.

Now, as he stood before Mrs. Harmon's door, his guilty heart made a very coward of him, blanching his cheeks; while he lingered and hesitated even with the knocker in his fingers, as though in doubt whether he should knock or not. But he mustered the resolution at last, though with so gentle a summons that it was a wonder Mrs. Harmon heard it. But she did, opening the door herself, and giving a little scream by way of welcome, that struck a nameless chill on Richard's coward, quaking heart.

"Well, sir! I'm sure, sir! Only to think, now! Who'd have thought it? My goodness alive! I never should 'ave expected to see you, sir, of all people in the world."

But when Richard, with a brief saluta-

tion, would have passed her she stopped him. "Into the parlour, sir," said she, in a voice not to be trifled with.

Now the parlour was Mrs Harmon's sanctum; and Richard's heart grew more cowardly still as he turned off from the headlong rush he was preparing to make up the stairs, and went into the small stuffy parlour, redolent with an aroma of tea and bread and butter, Mrs. Harmon's evening meal.

"Sit down, please sir," said she.

But Richard remained standing.

"And what may you please to want, sir?" said she, smoothing her rusty black silk apron and crossing her fat hands over it.

"My wife, Mrs. Wright," answered Richard.

"And so you've come after your wife, sir? Well, and quite right too, I'm sure; 'tis what a young married man ought to be doing—looking after his wife. All the same, sir, you won't come upon her here."

"Not here!" cried Richard.

"Ah! I'm not surprised you're sur-

prised, sir, seeing the nice genteel way you set about making of her comfortable with me and Susy. 'Mrs. Harmon,' says you, 'give her plenty of good wictuals and drink.' And so I did. Nobody can't be after saying of I didn't. But there, some people is that ungrateful, and some women, mostly wives, don't know when they're best off; and I'm certain sure Mrs. Wright didn't, for she was always a-fretting. She didn't show no water-works which some can bring to their eyes most every five minutes; but she was as grumbly and dissatisfied as the dog what seen his shadow in the water, and dropped his marrow bone. Susy and I couldn't make nothing of her; and I wasn't sorry when one fine morning she took herself and her baby off, never so much as giving the month's warning, as is customary; though, to be sure, she paid 'ansome, and didn't cause no words nor unpleasantness, which is mostly the way with ladies as takes theirselves off without so much as by your leave."

Richard listened in silence, fear knocking loudly at his heart.

"So she's gone," he said nervously, at last.

"Yes, sir, she's gone," replied Mrs. Harmon, noting every turn of his countenance, and marking certain changes in it down in her memory for her own especial edification hereafter.

"Has she left anything unpaid?"

"Paid every farden; which is a mercy, sir! seeing mine is such a respectable 'ouse. I've never had no call to have in the perlice. Old doctor's bill was a pretty tightish one, too, I fancy; though I didn't see it."

"Doctor!" exclaimed Richard; and this time he made no objection to take the chair Mrs. Harmon once more held towards him.

"Law bless you, sir! yes, the doctor. But there's no call to be jealous, for he's as respectable, fatherly old man as you'd wish to see; not but what I'll allow some of them old fellers is terrible rakish. But I picks and chooses for myself, and don't trust to no hearsay. Acts and deeds, says I, is the thing, and not flatter-some words, which makes a body perkish

and stuck up. No, sir, I'm not the woman to have any tomfoolery of no kind whatsoever poured into my willing ear."

"So she was ill?" said Richard, with emotion.

"She was as bad as bad could be, sir, for a bit. Susy says she was struck all of a heap one day when they was out on a bit of a spree together. She was terrible bad; and me and Susy nursed her together, and my daughter got that fond of her that she took to crying over her and sitting up with her at nights. She was just like a dead thing, sir; a-letting us do just what we liked with her, and her great eyes a-staring right out of her head, 'most making anybody quite creepy. I am sure I thanked the Lord for all His mercies when at last the doctor made 'em shut up somehow. I was for putting a penny-piece on 'em; 'tis a certain cure with a dead body's, but I wasn't listened to for a moment."

"Will you give me Mrs. Wright's address?" said Richard, rising and choking down his feelings with a great effort,

although every word of Mrs. Harmon's seemed to sear him as with a hot iron.

"Give you her address, sir?" and now came Mrs. Harmon's grandest piece of acting. "No, sir! not if you was to cut my tongue out!"

"Did she forbid you?" exclaimed he, hastily.

"Well, sir, she didn't, and she did. She didn't—because she never said in so many words, 'Mrs. Harmon, don't tell where I'm going.' No, she never said that. But she put it out of my power to tell you, because she never give me no information on the subject;" and Mrs. Harmon spoke as she felt, angrily disappointed.

Again Richard was silent. Then he said:—

"Mrs. Wright was always from a child very delicate, subject to—to such illnesses as you describe; and I desired her, if such an accident occurred, to go at once to her own relations, which, of course, she has done; but my being detained so long from England—three months—has prevented the possibility of my being

cognisant of this. I wish, with all my heart, I had not been detained so long; but business before pleasure. Is it not so?"

"Well, you see, illness comes before everything, or ought to. Them's my views, and——"

"Ah!" said Richard, interrupting her, and dropping a sovereign into her hand; "I ought to have thanked you for all your care and goodness to my wife. I am, indeed, deeply sensible of it."

"Thank you, sir. I'm sure, sir, and if I could help you in any way I would. Please give my dutiful respects to Mrs. Wright, sir; and I hope the baby don't be fretting so much as he used, nor be turning the 'ouse about with his screams at night. Babies is so troublesome, and 'specially when they're coming on with their teeth."

"Of course," said Richard, preparing to go.

Mrs. Harmon preceded him into the passage, and opened the street door.

"I suppose," said Richard carelessly, "Mrs. Wright took a cab to the station?"

“Station, sir! I didn’t hear no talk about no station. No, sir; ’twasn’t there cabby drove her.”

Another sovereign was eagerly grasped in Mrs. Harmon’s fat hand.

“For your daughter,” said Richard; “and so cabby drove her to——”

“Regent Street, sir; and the number of the cab was—let me see, what was it?” and, closing the door, she returned to the parlour; and taking an old-fashioned tea-pot from a chiffonier, began turning over its contents, picking out sundry pieces of paper, and nearly driving Richard wild with her dilatoriness, until she at length unfolded one, and read out, “Number 2104.”

“I ain’t going to part with the paper, sir, but you can mark it down; though, to be sure, you’ll have no call to use it, ’cause, of course, Mrs. Wright’s cosy enough with her relations, as you says; but in case cabby’s had more nor his fare, why, if you’re going to prosecute him, ’tis best to be on the safe side.”

“That’s just it,” said Richard, marking down the number, as she proposed;

“and now I really must wish you good morning. There is no occasion to mention my visit;” and another sovereign was greedily swallowed up in Mrs. Harmon’s hand.

“Certainly not, sir. My compliments to your lady.”

But Richard was gone; and Mrs. Harmon, with a great gulp of satisfaction, retired once more into her stuffy parlour.

“Three sovereigns!” said she; “he ought to have made ’em five, or I ought to have made ’em, if I’d ’ad any sense. Gone to her relations, indeed! His wife! No, I never won’t believe a word of it! She’s no better nor she ought to be, and he’s worse a deal than he ought to be. My goodness! that’s never Susan a-opening the door?”

But it was Susan.

“So you’ve had a visitor, mother?” said she, coming unexpectedly into the parlour, instead of taking her things off upstairs.

Mrs. Harmon had barely time to sweep the glittering sovereigns into her pocket, and in her confusion answered—

“Yes, Susy; Mr. Wright.”

“What! Mrs. Wright’s husband?”

“Yes, the same,” said Mrs. Harmon, seeing it was too late to retract.

Susan threw off her bonnet and jacket, and sat down opposite her mother at the tea-table.

“Why ’tis ’most cold,” said she, as she poured some tea into the cups; “not a bit of smoke coming from it. Why, mother, he must have been here a precious time?”

“Might be a quarter of a hour,” answered Mrs. Harmon, seemingly intent on her bread and butter.

“A quarter of a hour! More likely a hour, I should say. What did he want?”

“Why, what do you suppose he wanted? ‘I thank you and your daughter, Mrs. Harmon,’ says he, ‘for all you’ve done for my—wife.’ Oh! ain’t gentlefolks a stingy lot?”

“You’ve no call to say that. *She* paid you ’andsome.”

“She was ’bliged to,” answered Mrs. Harmon, sipping her cold tea.

“Why, Susan, girl!” exclaimed Mrs. Harmon, presently, “whatever makes you so absent?”

Susan had eaten nothing, and was sitting evidently in deep thought, with her cup poised midway between her mouth and the table.

Susan recovered herself with an effort, and for a minute or so ate away to her mother's satisfaction. Then she fell to thinking again, and nearly filled the tea-tray with boiling water.

“Good Lord, Susan!” cried Mrs. Harmon; “have you clean lost sight of your wits?”

“No, mother. Well, there!” said she, impatiently; “I passed Mr. Wright, and I can't never think where I've seen him; and it bothers me.”

Mrs. Harmon fell to thinking now; and Mrs. Harmon was a clever woman.

“Susan,” said she, when they had finished their tea, “if you can only mind where you've seen Mr. Wright, you and I are rich women for the rest of our mortal lives.”

Mrs. Harmon spoke so decidedly and

seriously that Susan never doubted she spoke the truth.

While Mrs. Harmon and Susan were at their tea, Richard Leslie took a cab, and sought the aid of a detective.

“Short, slim figure, but beautifully proportioned—Fair—Golden brown hair, worn in coils—Large, sad-looking blue eyes—Dress not known, but supposed to be a dark stuff—Child two years—flaxen hair in short curls—name Richard Wright, same as his mother’s—The above last seen driving in a cab, number 2104, in the direction of Regent Street. Address, Junior United Service Club, St. James Street.”

Such was Richard’s description of Lucy.

Then with a restless sinking of the heart he went back to his bride, and heard, with a feverish impatience, that Anna had received a letter which necessitated her immediate departure for Leighlands. Lady Elton was worse—much worse.

And Richard, feeling guilty as he did, dared not remain behind in London, or frame any excuse for doing so.

A few hours later he and Anna were

in the express train, which was speeding along at the rate of forty miles an hour towards Eastham.

This was the end of October.

CHAPTER V.

MISS GATHORNE IS MYSTERIOUS.

It's no' in books, it's no' in lear,
 To make us truly blest ;
 If happiness has not her seat
 And centre in the breast ;
 We may be wise, or rich, or great,
 But never can be blest.

Burns.

O,
 Dissembling courtesy ! how fine this tyrant
 Can tickle where she wounds !

Shakespeare.

AND in November the old church at Eastham tolled forth a knell.

It startled, but did not surprise the villagers, seeing Lady Elton's death had been expected. She died as she had lived, unloved, unregretted, and unmourned by the world at large. She had never been popular at Eastham. She was felt to be *the* lady of the place, but proud and unapproachable. No one, were he in

ever such trouble, appealed to Lady Elton for either sympathy or help. She had never been known to give a sou away in charity; and as to the villagers themselves, she ignored them all. Latterly, in her days of wealth, she had been lavish in charity, her name as the largest donor heading most of the Northborough list of charities; but then, not only did her left hand know what her right hand did, but the whole world around her. But these charitable donations did not individually benefit the Eastham people; they did not care for them, and they did not care for her, and so they did not regret her.

It is a solemn thing to hear the bell toll, knelling forth the last sad reminder that a soul has gone we know not whither; and a chill and dead silence reigned through Eastham as the bell boomed dully and mournfully through the thick November fog and drizzly rain. Mrs. Thompson, who washed for the Park, and knew, or was supposed to know, more about its inner life than most, remarked, "So she's gone! Well, poor lady, it's to be hoped she'll ha' more

mercy shown her than she ha' shown to most." It was scarcely a regret; but it was the nearest approach to sorrow expressed by any of the villagers for Lady Elton. But Betsy Harold was more demonstrative: "'Tis a good job she's gone; though I don't suppose old chicken-heart 'll ha' much o' her money. Most like she've left a goodish bit o' it to make her a big monument, so as to keep her stingy body fro' rising out o' the ground an' abusing him for wasting o' her sovereigns! Perhaps old 'Spitfire' 'll go next, an' then we'll be weeded o' all the bad uns."

Anna felt her mother's death greatly. With the new restless misgivings that possessed her, she could find it easy to forgive much of what she had once scornfully attributed to ambition and a cold want of feeling. The question of her marriage, once so sore a point between them, was never touched upon by either. Whether Anna was right or wrong, happy or not happy, Lady Elton never questioned. It was a subject that she seemed either unwilling to broach or was willing

should rest, as far as she was concerned, for ever; but often and often as Anna sat sadly by her mother's bedside her thoughts strayed to the old days, and with perhaps an unacknowledged regret to even herself for the fierce, obstinate way in which she had so determinately taken her stand against the threats, anger, scorn, and even pleadings that were brought to bear against her with regard to her marriage with Richard. If—if her mother had been right; if Richard had indeed deceived her as to his love for Lucy, then her happiness was wrecked, and she could even find it in her heart to think it best that her mother should be taken away, and spared that further overthrow to her pride which she would feel in the certainty—no, not certainty, for Anna might, in a measure, hide it—of her daughter's misery.

As for Sir Crosby he had fussed and fidgeted over his wife during her illness, whenever he had been allowed the opportunity; and now that she was dead and he had nothing left to fuss about, he wandered about in search of something else, and

finding nothing, felt a void and miss which was scarcely a regret. As to love, that was out of the question; his wife had ridden over him for so long that he had no room, latterly, for any feeling save one of fear and timidity lest he should say or do anything that would wreck his peace—a peace he had, it is true, purchased dearly by simply never expressing or having a will or wish of his own. She had brought him to be a foolish, pitiful old man, almost, if not quite, the butt of friends and acquaintances; and her death had come all too late to make a different man of him now. He missed her greatly, for the time had come to not only act but think for himself, and poor Sir Crosby was totally unable to do either.

So Lady Elton, in the midst of her ambition and pride, passed away and was forgotten; and soon after the funeral Richard prepared with his wife to leave Leighlands.

No tidings of the success or non-success of the search for Lucy had reached Richard, for how could they, seeing he had given his club address, and had not

dared to write for his letters for fear of accidents? He had in consequence been suffering a kind of martyrdom; and but for her anxiety and grief Anna must, or certainly might, have had a suspicion that he had a trouble of some sort. He had not dared to seek news, for in his mother-in-law's state of health, what business could or ought to draw him, and especially so soon, to London again? His guilt made him a very coward with Anna; it made him wary too; for knowing what he knew, he seemed to think that the very merest accident might withdraw the thin veil that covered his secret. Once during the six weeks of their stay at the Park Richard had hazarded a journey to Northborough; but Anna had immediately expressed her desire of accompanying him. And then the fear that she watched him began to creep upon him, and the certainty and possibility of escape for even a few hours to London left him. He would risk no chance of detection, so cursed his luck and remained quietly on at Leighlands. But to find Lucy he had determined—find Lucy he would. She was

his,—much more his than the proud cold girl he began to regard with fear, and a feeling akin to dislike.

Between Miss Gathorne and himself a gulf of coldness existed that seemed swelling and widening every day. She appeared to hail his presence as a signal for attacking him with her most snappish and caustic sallies, and not only him but his wife; so that Anna had learnt to look upon a visit to her husband's aunt as one of her greatest trials.

Just four days after the funeral Richard went with her to "The House" to say good-bye. This visit had been expected by Miss Gathorne, and openly commented on, and indeed made a source of squabbling between herself and Bridget, who had exhausted all her influence and arguments in trying to induce her mistress to don black for the occasion. She had even gone so far as to sponge, iron, and darn a very faded black stuff dress, which had not only done good service during its brightest days, but during its darkest had been dragged about on its owner's back in the garden, soiled with damp earth,

and torn amongst the rose trees. Still it was black, and would prevent the scandal of Miss Gathorne's being thought wanting in proper respect for her nephew's mother-in-law. So Bridget laid it—its best side uppermost—on the bed on the day in question. But Miss Gathorne was not to be taken in.

“Well, Bridget, you *are* a treasure,” said she, turning it over. “I thought the thing was on its last legs, but upon my word it'll do capitally for the spring. Here! put it by.”

“Won't you wear it to-day, ma'am, just to see how it looks?” pleaded Bridget.

“Wear that old rag of a thing when my nephew and neice are coming! She all of a glitter with her bugles! Why you must be mad! Certainly not.”

“But for the look of the thing, ma'am,” said Bridget, coaxingly.

“Ah, you may well say the look of the thing when it's a network of darns.”

“'Tis black all the same, ma'am; and you can wear an apron as 'll cover the worst of it.”

“I won't wear an apron, and I won't

wear that old rag! Put it away instantly! I won't put on black for my lady, not I! She's dead and there's an end of it! We must all die when our time comes, and I won't pretend a sorrow I don't feel. Get me out my claret-coloured merino. There is not an atom of black about it. I wanted black velvet trimmings, but Miss Clark would not put them, and as it turns out she has done me a great service; and I'll have my cap with cherry-coloured ribbons"—Miss Gathorne had lately taken to caps—"and as you suggest an apron, give me my light blue and white with the wide stripes."

And so dressed, Miss Gathorne awaited her visitors.

Richard handed his wife into the drawing-room with a light whistle on his lips. He generally whistled on going into "The House," but it turned off into a subdued curse when he came out of it.

His aunt rose with mock politeness.

"I wonder you have not learnt by this time to whistle on the wrong side of your mouth," said she, as she greeted her visitors.

“Well, and what do you want?” said she, fixing her eyes on Richard. “It can’t be money now you’ve married a wife with a golden cap and bells.”

Anna sighed scarcely audibly, and looked at her husband as he made answer.

“We have come to say good-bye. Anna has not been very well lately, nursing and all the rest of it; so I am going to take her up to town for advice.”

“What on earth can be the matter with such a great strapping young woman? She looks to me the picture of health.”

“We are not always what we seem,” said Anna, quietly.

“More shame to you then to live a life of lies.”

“Our feelings are not to be always thrust into the faces of our friends and neighbours surely?” returned Anna, her face slightly flushing.

“You’ve no business to talk about feelings at all. Haven’t you given them to your husband?”

“My *heart*, but I scarcely think my *feelings*,—that is to say——”

“That you are talking rubbish,” inter-

rupted Miss Gathorne. "I've never been married, thank God! but if I had I should not have had an opinion of my own by this time."

"My dear aunt, how jolly you are to-day," said Richard.

"Jolly! I never heard of the word. What's its meaning?"

"Well, facetious if you like it better."

"Let me see," said she, rising and fetching a large dictionary. Turning over its pages she presently read, '*Facetious: witty, jocose, merry.*' So that's your meaning of 'jolly,' is it? Then let me tell you you never were more greatly mistaken. I am far from being either one or the other. Jocose and merry indeed! when not a week ago I saw the feathers bobbing about on the top of my Lady Elton's hearse; and witty! Pooh! Where's the use before a couple of fools? I am not quoting myself," added she, seeing an indignant, not to say pained, look on Anna's face; "but I read everywhere, and hear everywhere, that new married people make fools of themselves."

"It is a mercy, aunt, you were never

married," answered Richard, with a slight dash of temper, which, at once perceived by Miss Gathorne, roused all her slumbering ire.

"A mercy is it? Ah! It mayn't turn out such a mercy as you suppose. I have a great weight of anxiety on my mind. There's that great hulk of a farmer's son made a hero of himself in the Crimea, as some other *men* I know of might have done, if they had only had an ounce of gunpowder fever in them. Samson's had his arm chopped off, and has been sent home to get the stump healed; and I can't help thinking what a dreadful loss it must be for the poor young man."

"It is a sad loss," replied Anna.

"Of course it's a sad loss; but that's not the worst of it. That young man—mark my words—will be guilty of some rash, foolish action, and I shall be the cause of it—I know I shall, and it worries me to death. I wish I could see a way out of it. If I had a husband I should; but as I have not, I don't. And this reminds me that this is the first time for fifty years that I have ever thought of

a man in the light of a husband as other than a most intolerable nuisance."

"But," said Anna, "cannot Richard help you?"

"Set a thief to catch a thief! Humph! It may answer in some cases where heads are as hard and tough as cocoa-nuts. Samson lost his heart long ago, and will lose his head as well, which, with the loss of his arm, will either make him an imbecile, poltroon, or a perfect devil of him. I am inclined to think the latter; so you may imagine how pleasantly I look forward to an interview with him. The very thought of it makes my poor old bones quake.

"Then why see him?" asked Richard.

"I must see him," said she, decidedly. "Oh, I've had him here before; he proposed in this very room to—to Lucy Campbell, before my very eyes; that will show you how little he sticks at. She didn't accept him *then*. God knows why she did afterwards, or why she allowed the mill stream to be the last sad witness of her sorrows."

There was a mournful pathos in Miss Gathorne's trembling words. Anna's face

paled to a deadly pallor, perceptible even through the thick veil she wore. As for Richard he turned away to the window and renewed his feeble attempt at a whistle.

“Richard does not like dismal subjects,” said Anna, desperately; “the girl’s end was a wretched mistake;” and her voice sounded cold and hard.

“They never found the body,” went on Miss Gathorne, steadily, the while her hands shook in her lap. “Strange—very strange; and they searched for days and days. Poor fools!”

“Damned fools!” cried Richard, facing round hotly, “who knew nothing of their work!”

But Miss Gathorne seemed as though she heard him not; murmuring to herself, scarce conscious of what she was saying, “They won’t find her now. London is a terrible quicksand on which to drift.”

“London!” echoed Richard, with a face as white as Anna’s.

“Yes, I said London; for does not the mill stream go winding and winding,

drifting and drifting on into the Thames? But perhaps not. Perhaps I am an ignorant old woman." Then, as if suddenly awakened, she added in a totally different voice, "You will stay luncheon, of course."

Richard muttered something about Sir Crosby; but Anna could not say a word. Rising, she in a half mystified, half frightened way made her adieux and hastened to the carriage.

Miss Gathorne's hand lay passively in Richard's; but her eyes looked searchingly, almost fiercely into the depths of his; so searchingly that he was fain to stoop his face, but she waved aside the kiss he was about to press on her forehead. Suddenly her hand grasped his, then as suddenly flung it aside, while a softened expression that had been stealing over her face vanished.

"I must and I *will* see him!" she cried, more fiercely than but now she had looked, and giving Richard a sharp push she shut the door in his face.

"Miss Gathorne becomes more enigmatical and more terrible each time I see

her," said Anna to her husband as they were being driven homewards.

"She's a cursed fool, or has gone clean out of her senses," answered he irritably.

These were the *first harsh words Anna had ever heard from Richard's lips.*

CHAPTER VI.

BY THE FIRELIGHT AND GASLIGHT.

Horror and doubt distract
 His troubled thoughts, and from the bottom stir
 The Hell within him ; for within him Hell
 He brings, and round about him, nor from Hell
 One step no more than from himself can fly
 By change of place.

Byron.

POOR, well-nigh heart-broken Lucy,
 securely as she had thought herself
 hidden away from him whom she dreaded
 now with a restless fear, had been marked
 down by the detective not many hours
 after he had been set on her track.

*No. —, — Street, Tottenham Court
 Road. Lady (Leslie, not Wright) ailing—
 money said to be fast going or gone. Child
 no better. Waiting further orders, etc., etc.*

In the solitude of his study on his
 return to London, Richard Leslie dared
 sit with this paper open in his hand. It

was dated nearly a month ago, and his heart beat fast with terror and dread as to what might have happened since this to the woman, little more than a girl, whom he had so cruelly deserted ; while a flush of anger overspread his face and mingled with his fear, for why had she boldly assumed his name ? Leslie ! How dared she do it ? It was a maddening risk to run ; but a word, one word from him would change it, and make her tremble at having braved his anger by so foolishly disregarding his wishes ; and how he longed with an intense longing to see her again, to fold her to his heart and tell her that that had never ceased to beat for her, and her alone, during this cruel separation. Yet hours must pass before he could venture forth in quest of her. The evening and the long hours of night must creep slowly by ere he could put his plan into operation.

How would she meet him ? In anger at his long absence and apparent desertion of her ? for surely anger caused by these feelings alone had induced her to torture him with the suspense and uncertainty of

her whereabouts. Not one fear that all his baseness and falseness was known to her possessed his heart. How could she suspect him? How could she, in her ignorance of London and London world, have possibly come to learn anything prejudicial to him? He cast his eyes on the paper again. "*Ailing—money fast going or gone.*" These words seemed to hush his very breathing. Lucy in poverty! Lucy in distress! he groaned and bit his lips in vengeful ire, and a feeling akin to hate swept through his heart as he thought of Anna and Miss Gathorne. But for these two what a different man he might have been! The former made a very coward of him; the latter a very devil!

Was it his fancy; or did Anna watch him; nay, it might be act the spy upon him? The thought maddened him, and he ground his teeth with rage and a torment of fierce passion. How dare she dog him? How dare she watch him?

"Ah!" and he crushed the paper up suddenly. What step is this that he hears coming softly, yet to the guilty man, with

loud-sounding footfall? Nearer and nearer it comes. It must be she! It is!

She has opened and closed the door behind her, and has drawn near to where he sits, and is looking with glittering suspicious eyes on the crackling, and scorching, and sudden flaring of the strip of paper he has hastily and not a minute too soon flung on to the fire; for he dreads this woman and her searching eyes, before whom his very eyelids quail.

One moment in the sudden light his face is fully revealed to her gaze, with its close set mouth and vengeful haggard look, enough to fright any timid new-made wife. But Anna is not timid. She is strong to do battle—strong to hold her own or to avenge if need be; and she never changes colour nor quails before the strange look she sees revealed by that flash of light on her husband's face.

But the blaze has died out. The sparks of light flicker like will-o'-the wisps hither and thither over the thin quivering ash of the paper. But Richard's face is now hidden from her gaze, and the room seems darker than when she first entered it.

Richard alone pierces the gloom ; he still seems to see the heavy, silken folds of his wife's rich black velvet dress, and the glistening of the jet ornaments on her fair white arms and neck, and the diamond stars shining resplendently in the glossy masses of hair gathered up carelessly about her head, and the sight well-nigh drives him to frenzy; for might not one of those priceless stars, which seem to mock him with their lightning flashes, have saved Lucy from despair? Despair! What, oh God! if it should be death!

And Anna never guessing his agony, or if she does, all unmindful of it, speaks.

“ Why, Richard ! not dressed for dinner ? ”

“ Dinner ! ” he mutters gloomily.

“ Yes, dinner. It only wants a quarter to the half-hour,” and she takes out a small jewelled watch, which flashes in the fire-light, dazzling his eyes afresh; so that he seems to see a long thin thread of luminous light reflected from one of the stars, and meeting half way down another streak of light flashing upwards from the watch.

“Was it a bill? Bills are tiresome things,” and she points to the flickering ash which still waves to and fro on the top of a coal, to which with devilish malice it appears to cling.

“A bill?” answers Richard; “yes—no. Waste paper.”

“And the waste paper basket at your feet, and half full of bits of paper. Are you going to set fire to them all?”

“Why not?” he mutters, and savagely thrusts his hand deep down amongst the countless bits.

“Don’t!” exclaims Anna, seizing his hand; “you might set the house on fire. Besides, one piece will answer your purpose. See!” and she touches the thin black waving ash with her white, jewelled fingers, and it floats upwards through the chimney out of sight. “There! what have you to fear now?” and she laughs.

But her laugh tortures him, for it rings through his ears mockingly. Does she—can she suspect? He loses all mastery over himself, and springing to his feet catches her arm roughly in his iron grasp.

"Speak! What do you suspect?" he asks, hoarsely.

"Suspect? Nay, you are mad! Let go my arm, Richard," she answers coldly and calmly, though she catches her breath with pain; "what is there to suspect?"

"True. I am mad—out of sorts—what you will!" and with something which sounds very like a muttered curse he leaves the room.

No sooner is he gone than Anna strikes a match, and lighting a small taper flashes the flickering light on to her arm. It is but a minute ago since she quivered with the pain, yet, short as the time is, there are four distinct purple lines staining the white delicate flesh. She looks long and gloomily, and bites her lip as she looks, but no angry vengeful words escape her.

"I knew he hurt me," she says, as she quietly puts out the taper.

That evening, during dinner, Richard cannot keep his eyes off the broad black velvet band which for the first time his wife wears round her arm.

He strives to look away from it, but he cannot, or if he does it pursues his

thoughts. He feels a very coward as its dark shade seems to throw an ominous gloom now here now there over every thing it comes in contact with, filling him with undefined fears and anxious forebodings of the future. Could he have grasped Anna's arm so roughly? or had she chosen to make believe to him that he had done so? If she had done the latter it was an insult! Yet an insult he durst not resent, durst not question, what though his blood seemed to boil within him.

But the dinner came to an end at last, and with a deep feeling of thankfulness Richard felt he was free. Free!

"We will go to the pantomime," said Anna.

And Anna was not the only woman who wilfully resolved to go to a pantomime that night; for Mrs. Harmon, notwithstanding that Susan was suffering from a sick headache, donned her best bonnet and shawl, and vowing that the theatre was a sovereign cure for all headaches, carried her daughter off to Drury Lane, where, as she said afterwards, she had a

presentiment some good luck was going to befall her.

How she shook her fat sides at the drolleries and jokes of the clown, until the tears trickled forth from her eyes, and her cough became so troublesome that, as Susan said, it went right through her head, making it beat like a hammer!

Mrs. Harmon had gone early to the theatre, and secured good seats in the very centre of the pit, so that she had a view of almost the whole house; and presently the opening of a door made her have another presentiment, and she turned her head to look at the new comers. Never had she seen, so she thought, a grander or prouder lady than the one upon whom her eyes now rested. Such a lovely velvet dress and two such magnificent diamond stars, sparkling so as almost to dazzle Mrs. Harmon's eyes, in her hair. Mrs. Harmon had no thought for the stage now; she had apparently forgotten the clown and his droll ways, for she watched the new comers eagerly. How haughtily the lady held her head! How gracefully she threw off from her white

falling shoulders her rich velvet cloak trimmed with sable! How she parted her red lips and smiled on the gentleman by her side! Yet in all her smiling ways there seemed an absence of heart. To a close observer she was as much an actress as any one of those she had come to see, and Mrs. Harmon, who watched her, was not slow in detecting this want of gold amongst the glitter of the tinsel, and arriving at the conclusion that she was not happy.

But there was yet another besides the lady and gentleman in the box; one who, to use Mrs. Harmon's own words, brought her heart into her mouth; for as her eyes pierced through the dusky light at the back of the box she saw, yet not so much in the background but what she recognised him immediately, Mr. Wright, and her eyes dilated as she gazed, for in what relation did he stand towards the lady with him in the box? He was not a stranger; he could not be even a casual acquaintance, nor a friend, for as he had divested the lady of her cloak she had laid her hand on his in more than a friendly way.

Mrs. Harmon watched, waited, and speculated, then suddenly her mind seemed to grasp the truth, or something very near it, for with a cry she turned and caught Susan's arm.

"Why mother!" cried the latter in a startled whisper; "be gone crazy? Have done, can't you?"

But Mrs. Harmon never felt more sane; she waited until her startled neighbours had again turned their attention stage-wards and then,—

"Susan," she whispered, in an almost tragic voice, "look to that box 'most over our heads to the right. There's a splendid lady in black velvet with diamond stars in her hair."

Susan did as she was bidden, and Mrs. Harmon, with her eyes once more on the stage, waited the result patiently.

"She's handsome and cruel looking," said Susan, presently. "She was here last year."

"Last year, girl! How can you mind that?"

"I don't know. I thought I'd seen her before."

“Look again, Susan,” said Mrs. Harmon; “there’s a man at the back of the box. Do you call to mind who he is? See! he’s looking this way, and—ah! my fine gentleman remembers us, does he?”

“Oh mother!” cried Susan, softly, in agitation, “it’s him and her we saw married, and—and oh! it’s Mr. Wright—*her* Mr. Wright.”

Mrs. Harmon’s cough returned. She coughed violently. When that was done she laughed wickedly.

“Let’s go, Susan,” she said, “and hang about the door. Why it’s a nest egg for us. Come!”

Had Richard Leslie really seen Mrs. Harmon? Yes; not only in the centre of the pit, but in the door of the theatre she meets his gaze, as he comes out with his wife, shawled and cloaked, on his arm. But in vain he looks for her as he leans eagerly forward in the carriage as he drives away; she is nowhere to be seen, yet every rumble of wheels following in his wake he fancies must be Mrs. Harmon in close pursuit.

Wearied out with torturing thoughts he

lay down to sleep at night; but even here he cannot rest; he would fain get up and pace the room, but he dare not; he is forced, though it almost amounts to agony, to feign the sleep he so eagerly seeks.

It comes at last, but in a terrible nightmare; the velvet band on his wife's arm is once more in fancy before him, but it is as heavy as lead. It is in vain that he strives to tear it away; as fast as he does so Mrs. Harmon comes, like an avenging judge, to bind it on again. He grasps it with his fingers; he exhausts himself with his frenzied efforts, cries out in his agony, and awakes.

"What is it?" asks Anna, so calmly that the thought rushes through him that she has never slept, but has been watching him the while he slept; "Are you ill?"

"No," he replies, trying to collect his straying thoughts.

"Is there anything on your mind?"

Again she seems to speak mockingly, and he thunders out another "*No*" loudly and ruthlessly. But scarcely has he done so when the pale moonlight reveals to his

startled, shrinking gaze a snow white hand and arm shadowed by some dark object at the wrist. Is madness coming upon him; or is it revenge which courses so swiftly through his veins? It is as much as he can do to prevent himself from fiercely grasping that fair arm, and inflicting on it some lasting injury; and he almost groans with the effort it costs him to resist the damning temptation. But Anna is surely asleep at last, for she is laughing softly.

Would the night never be gone? Yes, it fades away at last; but with the morning light a fever is raging through Richard's veins, so that to seek Lucy was impossible. To think of her well-nigh brought madness!

CHAPTER VII.

THE BRIDE.

There are things of which I may not speak ;
 There are dreams that cannot die ;
 There are thoughts that make the strong heart weak,
 And bring a pallor into the cheek,
 And a mist before the eye.

Longfellow.

A woman's hopes are woven of sunbeams ; a shadow annihilates them.

George Eliot.

SINCE the day on which Betsy had promised to marry Jacob, she had been living in a kind of dream—a dream of the present, for neither the past nor the future had anything to do with it. She was too proudly wounded to think of the past, too wilful and careless to dwell on what her future might be, the future of a life with a man for whom she had not one feeling of love. Her mother had roused her pride, angrily roused it; and while

that resentment lasted it was not likely that Betsy would repent. Repent! she would have walked through flames of fire to marry Jacob in her present mood.

Yet, though her spirit was indomitable and her determination unwavering, she was at times irritable, not to say fretful and passionate, if the slightest thing went contrary to her wishes; at others her spirits seemed overpowering, and she laughed at the very trifles that had roused her ire.

Her mother was ill at ease. Had she done rightly in awakening Betsy's pride? Was she doing well in countenancing a marriage that filled her with vague misgivings?

"Betsy," she said one day when her daughter's eyes had looked brimful of tears, which only a wild peal of laughter dispelled; "Betsy, I'm half of a mind that this marriage ain't for your good."

And Betsy had tossed her head and answered,—

"What call have you to say that? Jacob's satisfied, ain't he? and I'm satisfied, and you won't get a more dutiful

son-in-law"—this scornfully—"look the world top to bottom."

"It ain't that, Betsy. I'm fond o' Jacob; I like Jacob; but—but——"

"Oh! out with it!" cried Betsy, "I ain't good enough for him! I'm a sinner in more senses nor one."

"Doest love him, Betsy, ever such a little bit? Do his voice touch thy heart ever such a little? Oh! I'd be more satisfied if I thought it did."

Betsy laughed. "Doest think I'm a-going to kiss an' tell," said she; "bide a wee an' see how I do disport myself as Jacob's wife; then if I don't do well, 'tis time to begin an' fash."

"'Twill be too late then, Betsy," sighed Mrs. Harold; "too late for both you an' me."

"Yes!" cried Betsy almost fiercely, "'twill be too late for me, an' I'm glad o' it! Once I'm Jacob's wife I'm safe, an' no one dar'st touch me, an' I won't ha' the right to think o' no man, an' I'm glad o' it! Jacob knows I don't love him," said she with defiance, "an' if he's content to put his head in the fire, what do it

concern me or you or anybody else? Why for should you be a-hankering after pulling him out afore he's singed a hair?"

"Please God you won't let him singe a hair, Betsy."

"Please God I will! A great man like he not able to look after hisself! Is the world a-going upside down, an' girls to look after their sweethearts! 'Tis a pretty state o' things I declare."

"No, Betsy, I hope it ain't come to that, an' I hope Jacob'll ha' the sense to look after you—that I do!"

"Oh, he's a idiot, is he? an' I'm a out an' out slippery eel. A pretty tidy pair we'll make, an' no denying it."

"Betsy," began Mrs. Harold; but her wilful daughter stopped her.

"There mother, don't say no more. If 'twas possible to make a girl make away with herself, you'd ha' druv me to it years ago, when you beat me for tearing o' my clothes in the brambly bush. Didn't I sob my heart out just! 'Twas bad enough for Ben to ha' pushed me in amongst the blackberries, but 'twas ten times worst to be beaten for telling a lie,

when I was a-telling o' the truth all the whilst."

Mrs. Harold was silenced, but neither convinced nor easy in her mind. She dreaded this marriage, and fretted as to whether she was doing right in allowing it. Yet after all, how could she stay it? Day after day she watched her daughter, and day after day she grew more uneasy. Her fingers trembled the while she sewed at the wedding-gown, a bright blue, a colour which grated sorely against Mrs. Harold's taste; it seemed to speak so clearly of the bride's giddy propensities. And Mrs. Harold might shake her head, and prognosticate evil; but Betsy only laughed at her fears or ridiculed them.

"Why for shouldn't it be blue?" said she; "I hate brown, 'tis unbecoming, an' grey's dowdy, an' black'll do well enough when I'm a widder, an' Jacob ain't no mind to be dying off just yet; 'tis time enough to think 'bout that when I've worried his life a bit. It'll be my best gownd too, an' Jacob'll ha' to take me fairing here an' there a bit, an' a-merry-making. I don't believe it'll fade, an' if

it do it'll dye one o' them same bad luck colours you're a-hankering after, an' I'll wear it again an' no one know it ain't new; an' law! won't they be a-crying out agin' my extravagance, an' Jacob's folly, an' all the rest o' it for a-humouring o' my fancies! as if, my! it wasn't a man's duty to humour a handsome wife, seeing as how her head gets sooner perked up wi' vanity nor a ugly one's."

Still silenced Mrs. Harold sewed on at the gown; but as it drew near to its completion her fingers grew more unsteady, and her heart had more misgivings. It was just unlucky—so she reasoned presently to herself—to be so downhearted and trembly about the wedding-dress, for after all what could the colour have to do with the bride's future happiness? Ah! that was just it; would she—would they be happy? Sure enough Jacob would, if only Betsy would let him. But would she let him? Might she not fret at the bit and prove restive, or by-and-bye with a bold front follow the bent of her will, an obstinate headstrong will, as Mrs. Harold knew to her cost? And what if in the end

she made a caged lion of Jacob? This was a sad sequel indeed, but one at which Mrs. Harold was always arriving. The more the poor woman thought of or turned over all the probable contingencies of this marriage, the more dismally she shook her head, and the more low spirited she grew; until she dreaded thinking about it at all, or forced her thoughts away from the subject as an unpleasant one, that didn't mend itself by being dwelt upon. The one little piece of comfort she hugged to her heart was that Betsy hadn't a bad heart, and if only Jacob let her alone, things would right themselves after a fashion and be happy enough; and though Betsy, alas! would never make him a pattern wife,—and the idea of Betsy's making a pattern wife to anybody filled Mrs. Harold's mind with awe—yet, as wives went, she wouldn't be no worse than most.

Jacob had no dismal forebodings. All with him was *couleur de rose*. He had long been accustomed to his betrothed's vagaries and uncertain temper, and neither the one nor the other troubled him. Betsy

had promised to marry him ; Betsy had promised to love him by-and-bye ; and Jacob was satisfied that when she was his wife her love would not long be trembling in the balance. As for Joe Simmonds, Jacob, strange to say, had no fear of him. Betsy was too proud to care for a man who had evidently no love in his heart for her. Besides, Joe was now a gentleman.

The wedding-day, the first of the new year, rose bright and cold ; but Betsy felt not the cold. Her blood seemed on fire, and burnt fiercely within her. Her eyes, her cheeks, were aflame. Yet never had she looked so lovely !

Owing to recent rain the village roads were muddy, so the bright blue gown was tastefully tucked up over the bride's scarlet petticoat. Her small feet looked smaller than ever in their high-heeled boots, with a blue rosette on each, Betsy's own handiwork—for her mother had stoutly refused her aid to this piece of vanity ; so Betsy had made the rosettes herself, about the only things she had made, for she had kept to her passionate resolve that she would not stitch her fingers off—same

way Anne Campbell had done—by not stitching at all. She had a little white bonnet, with orange blossoms, perched coquettishly on her small head; and a blue ribbon tied up the masses of her wavy dark hair. As to her cloak, who dared say a word against it? seeing it was Jacob's gift; though some might be ill-natured enough to suggest that it was never his own free choice, but that his bride had won it from him with a bright saucy smile, and a kiss of her rosy lips; the colour of the latter almost as red as the scarlet of the cloak, of the shape known as the "Colleen Bawn."

How viciously Miss Gathorne would have rated the bride, had she seen her almost pertly picking her way over the sloppy road to church; but Miss Gathorne was closeted with Joe Simmonds, breaking to his bewildered mind the fact of Lucy's death being a fiction, an abominable imposition which he, she, and everybody had been fools to believe. She said not a word as to her suspicion—almost amounting to certainty—of Richard's complicity in the matter; although she trembled lest

he should make a guess at it, yet trusted to his dogged nature and thick skull. But Joe Simmonds was no longer the Joe Simmonds of old; and although his former passionate temper flamed in his eyes when he began to realize as a possibility the fact of Lucy being alone and deserted in that Babylon to which she had either flown or been enticed away to escape a marriage with him, yet Joe the *clod* existed no longer. He was now, mainly owing to his own exertions, growing to be Joe the *gentleman*. His mind had expanded, had gained, as it were, its equilibrium; and his feet had lost their slouching gait, and moved with a firm, manly stride. His eyes never furtively dodged yours, but looked you straight in the face; and even his one hand had found a rest from its awkwardness; while his tongue had learnt to speak soberly, and without blurting out hotly and impulsively whatever first came into its owner's heart.

He sat in a dazed sort of way while Miss Gathorne hurriedly told her tale. Once she thought, from the grey ashen pallor that overspread his face, that he

was about to faint; but Joe startled that fear out of her by impetuously springing up, and excitedly pacing about the room. Then by-and-bye, without a word, he sat down again; while she, ignorant of his feelings, began an imploring appeal that he would seek and find Lucy, and bring her back to Eastham; or, if that were not possible, that he would find her a safe home of refuge somewhere. And again he interrupted her by once more springing to his feet, crying out hotly that, so help him God, he would not only find her, but that he would hunt down the man who had brought her to this pass—hunt him down like a dog!

Terrified that somehow her words had accomplished more than she wished, terrified, also, at such unusual violence, Miss Gathorne leant back in her chair, totally unable to grasp the circumstances she was placed in; and in these few moments of indecision, Joe Simmonds, with a fierce angry light in his eyes, strode forth from the room.

Presently Miss Gathorne heard the loud swinging backwards and forwards of the

gate, even as Lucy had heard it two years and more ago, when the same man had passed through it, burning with hot, revengeful, jealous feelings, leaving Richard Leslie for dead under the dark shade of the tall trees. Onwards he strode, with, as it were, a raging fire within him, that from henceforth nothing, and no one, save, perhaps, his lost love, might be able to quench.

As he reached the gate of the church, the bridal party came almost across his path, the bride looking, if that were possible, more lovely than ever, for her cheeks were more flushed, and her eyes more bright, than when she had so pertly, in all her new-donned finery, picked her way over the muddy road to church. As Joe drew near the bride halted, flashing her eyes at him almost angrily, while, for the first time that day, her hand seemed to rest on her husband's arm proudly.

So they had met at last!—met when she was Jacob's wife! Thus the vow she had secretly vowed, of never looking on his face again until she was another man's wife, was accomplished. But where was

the remorse or sorrow she expected to see?

Joe had only arrived in Eastham that morning, and none hardly knew of his arrival, certainly none of the bridal party, who, as soon as they caught sight of him, gave, in the exuberance of their spirits, "three cheers for the gallant Captain."

Mechanically Joe raised his hat and passed on, for the fire within him burnt as hotly as ever; and I doubt if, in his present perturbed state of mind, he recognised any one of the party. Jacob lifted his cap with the rest, and, being close to him, held out his hand; but Joe never saw it, neither did he give one stray glance or kind look at the proud rustic beauty, whose bright blue dress touched him as he passed her by.

Betsy clung tightly to her husband's arm, and the light in her eyes died out, and the red flush in her cheeks faded as she looked wistfully after him.

"Put on your hat, Jacob," she said, in so touching and mournful a voice, that Jacob after doing as she bid him, felt constrained to draw her tenderly to him.

And without another word spoken between them, they reached Mrs. Harold's cottage. Here the bride clung more tightly to her husband's arm ; and, as her friends pressed round her, she turned wearily towards him, and, with so pale a face and broken voice, said,—

“ Oh, Jacob, man ! take me away out o' sight—out o' sight ! ”

The words had scarcely passed her lips when, for the first time in her life, Betsy dropped on to the floor in a dead faint.

CHAPTER VIII.

ANYTHING BUT A MISSION OF MERCY.

O the long and dreary winter !
 O the cold and cruel winter !
 Ever thicker, thicker, thicker
 Froze the ice on lake and river,
 Ever deeper, deeper, deeper
 Fell the snow o'er all the landscape,
 Fell the covering snow, and drifted——

Longfellow.

IT was a bitter cold day in January. The snow had fallen fast during the night, and icicles hung pendant and glistening from many a window and house-top. The cold, in comparison with that of late years, had set in late, and to the beggars had come as a boon, for already they had taken advantage of it to parade the streets cautiously, minus their—if they possessed any—shoes and stockings. Ostensibly they sold—some tracts or songs in doggrel rhyme, but oftener boxes of

matches, which they thrust under the noses of passers-by, who were, in that whining tone peculiar to beggars, solicited to buy, if only a halfpenny-worth, to keep them and their multiplicity of children, or brothers and sisters, from starving. They durst not ask for alms, but their abject looks and anxious, imploring eyes spoke plainly their wishes, though, perforce, their tongues to beg were silent.

It was bitterly cold ; so cold that even the lady, with many thousands at command, who sat reading the last new novel, shivered as she sat, with her dainty feet on the fender, before a roaring fire. What must it have been to those poor, miserable, half-starved ones, who, but thinly clad, cowered over the few flickering, dying embers of a make-believe fire ?

Yet among these latter was Lucy. Ever since she had fled from Mrs. Harmon's she had been drifting deeper and deeper into poverty. The few pounds she possessed, though doled out so sparingly, had dwindled into shillings, until she saw in the future want staring her in the face. She would have worked if she could ; was

willing to work. But how? where? She had tried, striven her best to get work, had hoped against hope, until hope had died out, and despair taken fast hold of her heart.

Until Richard's cruel desertion Lucy's experience of the world was small. She had thought work was to be had for all those willing and able to work. Alas! she found work to be the most difficult thing to be had. Work, without a character, or a single friend to speak for her! Some pitied her, some laughed at or insulted her; but none, not one, had compassion on her. But two days ago she had reduced her small stock of money to a mere trifle, by the payment of her rent; and where—where could she get money to pay for the next week's lodging?

In her miserable room there was just a glimmering of fire in the grate, before which, this cold day, she had seated herself on a low stool, so that the slight warmth should rest on her boy, whom she vainly, as yet, strove to hush to sleep in her lap. He had grown accustomed to hunger, and never cried at that; but the

cold was new to him, and he sobbed with it—sobbed, though nestled close to his mother's bosom, until another of her treasured shillings had gone, lest, in her agony, the cold should pierce his thin clothing, and take hold on his little shrunken limbs, and he should die. Die! How her very soul shivered at the thought! Would God, indeed, be so cruel as to take her only one from her? No, no; it was not possible. *He* was just and merciful; He would have compassion, if none else would; He would not punish her sin thus. Sin! Had it been a sin to shun, fly from a marriage her very soul had loathed? There had been no other help, no other loophole of escape. Richard alone had offered to save her. But how had he saved her? Had he not plunged headlong into ruin since, and had she not been the means of making him do so? In anguish she bent over her boy, and once more essayed to rock him to sleep; and presently a soft, low song, that sounded like the wail of a gentle but breaking heart, issued from her lips; nor did she cease that mournful singing until he slept. But

even then she sat on, with the child cradled in her lap. What hope had she? None.

By-and-bye she drew a letter from her bosom. It looked old, and faded, and worn. It was the letter Richard Leslie had sent her while she was yet at Mrs. Harmon's—the letter she had watched and waited so patiently for. She had not dared read it *then*; but long since it had been blistered with her bitter despairing tears. Yet it was a deceitful one, for in its every line breathed love; in it he said not a word of his marriage. There was love, there was tenderness in it, and—yes, there was a nameless sadness—a sorrow that struck home to her heart. Did she still love this man who had deceived, betrayed, and outraged, not only her love, but her womanhood? She did not dare think whether she did or not; she put the question far from her when it rose and troubled her; while the feeling that she must hide from him, never see him more, but, if possible, let him think her dead, grew more and more fixed in her heart.

She drew, as I have said, the letter from

her bosom, as she sat ; and although long since she had known every word in it by heart, yet she opened it and read the first few lines—read until the hand that held it dropped softly on to her boy in her lap, and her thoughts went straying away to where those first lines seemed to point. She was once more at Eastham with Miss Gathorne, in thought a child, fretting because her benefactor had been cross and obstinate and hard to please ; or she was reading aloud to her some book, half of the hard long words of which she had been unable to understand ; or, further still, her thoughts went back to the time, the day, on which she had first seen Richard, and had blushed so hotly because he had patted her on the head, and said what a pretty girl she was. And then away went her heart roaming swiftly over days and weeks and months, until the bright day by the mill stream, when the young lord had pleaded so earnestly for her love, came before her vividly. He said he loved her, and she felt he loved her, though his words were not so hot and passionate as those with which Richard

had wooed and won her. They said he was rich as well as noble, and he seemed to her both good and gentle; and the sadness of his eyes she never could forget when she had refused his love. What would he say to her now? Lucy glanced round her miserable room, with its scanty furniture and piece of torn carpet, just enough to cover the spot where she sat, and then at her shabby, well-worn dress, her last remaining one; and suddenly, as she looked at the small, pinched features of her boy, and smoothed the clustering curls from off his thin forehead, she thought of Joe,—Joe, whose love she had scorned; Joe, whose love she had trampled on. Had he forgotten her with the rest? had he allowed the memory of her to die out? or did he, when his steps took him past the mill stream, breathe a prayer for her who was supposed to be sleeping so calmly beneath it?

The day faded away as Lucy sat, and the evening drew on. She wrapped her boy up as warmly as her scanty means permitted, and laid him in bed, and once more went back to her seat by the smoul-

dering fire, and, burying her face in her hands, thought on.

Somehow her spirit seemed faint. She had been hoarding her money, and had not tasted food for hours; a clammy moisture was on her brow, and her body seemed to be growing strangely weak. But it was not death—it could not be death, for her hands burnt too hotly. Pray God she is not going mad!

Broken in heart, broken in spirit, bending her aching head in her hands, and striving with those poor, feeble hands to press tightly her throbbing temples, Lucy heard the opening and shutting of the street door below; and, softly as it was opened and shut, the noise seemed to pain her, for she pressed her fingers tighter over her brow. There was a whispered sound of voices presently, but Lucy scarcely heard them, or, if she heard them, she heeded them not; they could bring no help, no relief to her.

They ceased, those voices, and a woman's dress comes rustling up the stairs. Lucy is roused now. She half raises her head, for the sound has struck

upon some unforgotten chord of memory. Her poor, feeble hands tremble in her lap the while the woman's softly-treading step comes slowly on, and the rustling of her dress becomes more distinct. It is a silken dress which has roused poor Lucy's slumbering faculties, and it recalls vividly to her memory the tall, proud form of Anna Elton. Just so she always stepped; just so her dress carelessly brushed past obstacles that impeded its onward progress, rustling arrogantly, as though testifying to the pride and haughtiness of its wearer.

Lucy did not move, she sat spell-bound, her eyes—terrified-looking eyes they were—fixed on the door. Who is this whose every footfall strikes dismay into her heart, making it beat faster than it had ever beaten yet? Has she come at last to worm her secret from her?

Lucy had hidden from Richard, had dreaded his finding her; but of Anna she had never thought, save to think that to her she must be as dead. But she knew, as she listened to the footstep without, that her rival in Richard's love had found

her out, and as an enemy—an avenging enemy—would stand before her in another moment. She came in, that thickly-veiled, and, though darkly, richly-clad woman, bringing with her a candle, dripping and sputtering, in a dirty candlestick, and closing the door behind her, placed the light on the table; then, with a step that seemed as though the heavens themselves must fall if she so willed it, came and stood before the lovely, shrinking girl, whose eyes, in their frightened gaze, looked like livid burning coals.

“You know me?” she said, fiercely thrusting the long, rich folds of her silk dress impatiently behind her.

But Lucy did not answer save with her eyes, which never left her questioner’s face, nor lost the terrified expression they had but now worn.

What a contrast the two formed! The one in her dainty, rich apparel, with her proudly-poised figure, hard, cold face, and fiercely gleaming eyes. The other, crouching on her low seat in her shabby dress, with her large, terrified eyes shrinkingly questioning the fiery orbs of the other, as

though she was about to hear words spoken that might be as a deathblow to her.

“You know me?” asked Anna again—for it was indeed she—towering above Lucy defiantly, like an angry Medea.

Know her? Was it possible Lucy could ever forget her? She (Anna), that proud one who had stolen Richard from her. But for her would she be as miserable as she is now? but for her would she have been so shamefully betrayed?

Lucy’s eyes lost their terrified look, and for a moment a light as angry as Anna’s blazed in them; then that faded away, and a mournful, hopeless expression succeeded. Her cheeks, which had been so feverishly bright, faded to the paleness of death.

“Yes, I know you,” she answered softly.

“My name! my name!” demanded Anna, with scarce concealed passion.

“Anna Elton.”

“It is false, and you know it! I bear *his* name, and am *his* wife. I am Anna Leslie!”

Lucy shivered as though with cold, but gave no answer.

“Yes, I am his wife. I can never be Anna Elton again. Never! And I would not wish it; for I love him—love him passionately, madly. Take your hands from your face, and listen to me!”

For Lucy had once more drooped her head on to her hands in her lap. But she raised her face at Anna’s bidding—

“Spare me,” she said.

“I will not spare you. I will have it out with you now I am here. Do you suppose I have sought you out of pity or compassion? Miserable girl, I have seen Mrs. Harmon!”

“God help me!” murmured Lucy, piteously.

“Did you suppose she would keep your guilty secret, or fail to publish it if she could do so with advantage? Oh, you kept it well and skilfully; but she saw me at the theatre, sought me out, and told me—what matters,” broke off Anna, passionately, “what she told me? I knew, had known for months, that Lucy Campbell was not dead but living, and—and, girl, I hate you!”

“I suppose you must,” answered Lucy.

“The fierce fire of hate seems to have raged within me since I heard from that woman the miserable story of your shame and his—his, my husband, whom I have sworn to love and honour. Where is my pride gone that I should bandy words with you, or confess to the jealous fears of my heart? I hate you because he was ensnared by you; hate you because he deceived me and married me with a deadly secret hidden away in his heart. All this has raised a raging fire in my breast. I have known no rest since *she* came, could know none until I had had you tracked out, and could stand, as I do now, face to face and tell you that I hate and defy you!”

“You need not do that,” answered Lucy, humbly.

“I need! I will do it! You befooled Anna Elton, but you shall not befool Anna Leslie. I feel as if I could be fierce in my just anger,—aye, and revengeful. Am I not a wife, and *his* wife? You dare not come between him and me. You cannot guess how cruel I could be! Do I look like a woman that would have any pity?”

Again Lucy shivered as she caught

sight of Anna's face so full of bitter, malevolent frowns.

"You cannot harm me," she said.

"I can, and I will, if you dare so much as parley with my husband again. It drives me mad to look at you and know that he should ever have been allured by you! It drives me mad, I tell you, to know that he should ever have spoken of love to you! I *will* do you harm," cried she, wrathfully, "if you attempt to come near him again or thrust your vile self in his path!"

"Vile!"

"Yes, vile! degraded! lost! disgraced! and through your artful scheming. Your sin lies on your own head. You thought you could draw him into a marriage with you. You thought he loved you. No, no!—a thousand times no! You have fallen through your own ambitious folly and pride. You might have been a good man's wife, and you are a thing I dare not name; sunk so low that I feel it a shame that I, a wife, should be speaking with you; you, whom to think of is a degradation!"

Lucy staggered to her feet, her large blue eyes dilated with pride and scorn.

"How dare you say these words to me? I could crush you where you stand if I would. Make you kneel at my feet for that very mercy and pity you but now made a boast of refusing me!"

Anna laughed scornfully.

"But you will not do this," she said; "you durst not attempt to win back his love."

"Why should I not *claim it*?" answered Lucy, proudly.

"Claim it! Would you step between husband and wife? But you shall not; you will not—and because you have a child, whom, if possible, I hate tenfold more than I do you."

Lucy's pride gave way. "Oh, my God! spare him!" she cried.

"Why should I?" asked Anna, mockingly.

"Not for his wretched mother's sake; nor for his—for any one's sake but his own. He is so small; so weak; so defenceless; and,"—her voice became inaudible—"so cold and hungry."

“What care I for his weakness? Let him die! I feel as if I could snatch him up and thrust him without doors this bitter cold night, not only to meet his death, but to watch him meet it. Oh; there is no measure to the hate I feel for him and you! Swear to me,” she cried suddenly, “that you will never see Richard Leslie again. Swear it!”

“I dare not,” tremblingly replied Lucy. “God knows I do not wish to see him; but to swear never to see him again—oh, I cannot!” and the sickness of death seemed to smite her at the thought of never again seeing this man, whom she would fain persuade herself that she no longer loved, and from whom she had hidden lest harm should befall him.

Exasperated beyond control Anna seized her by the arm.

“Say that you know he hates you, then! Say that he tired of you, and that you knew it when you were struggling for life at Mrs. Harmon’s. Say that he told you of his marriage with me, and how he had deceived you! Say that if he ever comes to seek you, you will by some means

or other tell me of it! Say that you will do this!"

"I will never betray him," murmured Lucy.

"Have a care, girl," said Anna, proudly recovering herself; "you forget the child."

An expression of anguish crossed Lucy's face.

"No harm can happen to him while I am by," she said; "but even if it could, he, my child, shall never help betray his father. Let us be, we have sorrow enough of our own without intermeddling with yours."

"Enough," replied Anna, as though with sudden resolution; "we have been together too long. I will have my revenge: I swear it! and—well then I will see you again."

Flinging the long skirt of her dress over her arm, Anna passed out of the room; while Lucy, tottering over to where her boy slept, fell on her knees by his bedside, and sobbed and wept as she had not sobbed and wept for months.

Yet had she but known it there was one keeping ward and watch without, longing,

yet fearing, to see her ; one who, with the help of the same detective, had tracked her down : even Joe Simmonds, who patiently bided his time, before he ventured to set foot across the threshold of her door.

CHAPTER IX.

LOST !

Have I not?—

Hear me, my mother earth ! behold it, heaven !

Have I not had to wrestle with my lot ?

Have I not suffered things to be forgiven ?

Have I not had my brain seared, my heart riven,

Hopes sapped, name blighted, life's life lied away ?

Lord Byron.

WHAT a night of misery did Lucy pass ! Her poor head throbbing and burning, and her brain racked with fearful doubts and fears. How closely she clasped her boy to her beating heart, as though only thus she could persuade herself that he was safe and near her. How she trembled as she thought of Anna's words and Anna's last look. How she sobbed and wept afresh at Richard's baseness. At one moment she courted sleep as a rest for her weary soul ; at another she fought against it lest it should be then that Anna would fulfil

her threat of snatching her boy from her. With impatience she sighed for the morrow; that morrow which must find her gone in search of some other hiding-place more miserable than her present one; for, with scarcely a shilling in her pocket, what place ever so humble could be a shelter for her long?

Over and over again during the long night Lucy thought of Joe Simmonds. Rough and unpolished as he was, his heart, she felt—had felt long since—was true and noble at the core. Should she in this her sore need seek him and implore him to protect her boy, and this done, wander forth alone once more in her search for work; or it might be that he could help her to get some. Hope once more, notwithstanding her present desperate state, seemed to flash across her heart and bid her be of good cheer as Joe's image rose vividly before her. But it was only to sink into a worse state of despondency, as she suddenly thought he might question her, and far more closely and to the purpose than Anna had done; and what could she say? or how account for Richard's

cruel desertion of her? The blood mounted over her neck and brow making the fever in her veins burn more hotly; but to betray Richard she never thought. She could not—she would not. Let her die! She was weary, very weary. Only let Joe promise—solemnly promise—to befriend her boy, and she would cease her fight for life,—nay, with one long kiss on his pale, thin lips she would resign him and her hold on life, and let death, if he chose, expiate Richard's sin, and Anna's misery, and her own.

Ah! she was very weary. Yet, when the morning light broke, her resolution to seek Joe's help had taken fast hold of her heart. She would go to Eastham; it could not be so far away when a few hours had brought her from it to London. Strength would be given her to walk it, even encumbered with her boy, or she might meet with some good Samaritan, like Jeremiah Dobbs, who would give her a lift in his cart.

She rose at daybreak to put her resolution into execution, but found, with dismay, that her strength had diminished

greatly. Her want of food, her stormy interview with Anna, her long night's feverish vigil, had exhausted it, and she could scarce, with her burning, trembling fingers, dress herself, much less attend to the peevish wants of her boy. She could clasp him to her heart, and tell him of a new, happy life in store for him, where he would have warmth and food; but she could not set forth in search of it. She could cover him with kisses, but she could not make him understand that she was powerless to help him; and when, in his little childish prattle, he asked to be taken to the good man who was to give him plenty of meat, she could only rain down a fresh shower of kisses, and groan in anguish that he should care so little at parting with the only one he had ever had to love or care for him.

All the morning Lucy husbanded her feeble strength. She prepared more food for her miserable breakfast than she had ventured to allow her boy and herself for weeks past. But it would not do; she could not eat it; exhausted nature refused to be helped or sustained; and she was

fain at last to let the hope that she had cherished, of seeking Joe, fade away for that day at least. As the morning wore on the fierce burning of her skin, the parched state of her lips, the throbbing of her temples, and the trembling of her limbs, convinced her that it needed all her will, and all her little remaining energy, to prevent herself from succumbing to the fever which surely raged in her veins, ruthlessly seeking to derange her overtaxed brain; and it was in a state of mind little short of agony that she grasped the possibility of her having only resolved to seek Joe when, perhaps, death had already claimed her for its victim. If it should be so, who would take care of her boy? Was it not agony to know that there was a chance that he might be thrown motherless and, alas! fatherless on the world? What torture did not all these fears cause Lucy!

By-and-bye Mrs. Brown, the landlady, came into Lucy's room. Why had she come? It was not the day for her rent. Had Anna, had Richard sent any message?—or had Anna divulged her secret

to the latter, and had he come to seek her? If so the measure of the bitterness she was drinking would overflow, for God knows she could bear no more. If it was he, then, indeed, her scattered senses would leave her, for she would have no power to keep them together. She moaned feebly in anticipation of what Mrs. Brown had come to say. But Mrs. Brown seemed to have come entirely on her own account, for she started back as soon as she caught sight of Lucy.

“Oh, good Lord!” she said. “My! how baddish you do show! There! I thought you was took with summut when you comed down for the water this morning. Here!” continued she, snatching the child up in her arms, “don’t you be a-worritting of your mammy, but bide still while she lies down a bit. Come, Mrs. Leslie, you ain’t fit to be about—that you bain’t!”

“I dare not lie down!” replied Lucy, with an effort.

“Oh, -no; not for Joe! with this boy a-fretting and a-worritting of you. Well, now, I don’t mind, once in a way, mind

you, to stay with 'ee for a bit, and look that he don't be a-falling into—well, there ain't no fire, so there ain't nothing he can hurt hisself with. Come, you get on to the bed!" said she authoritatively, almost lifting Lucy on to the miserable couch. "Why, you'm like a blazing fire about the body. Here, Dickey, you come and lie down 'side of your mammy, while I go and get her some medicine."

Poor little Dickey did as he was bidden, and Mrs. Brown took herself off; while Lucy instinctively felt at the few remaining pence she had in her pocket, and sighed to think that even they would not be left her to begin her journey with on the morrow.

In some twenty minutes or so Mrs. Brown returned, bearing in her hand a small mug covered with a piece of paper.

"There!" said she, sniffing at it; "chemist's man told me 'twas the very identical as he used to serve me with when my Tom was bad, afore he went to Californy; and, Lord! didn't it soon set him on his legs again, when he was floored same as you! Why, you'll feel as strong

as a horse a hour after you've swallowed it, and fit," said she, with a curious look, which was lost on Lucy, "to walk from here to Jerewselly to-morrow, if so be as you wished it, which of course you don't."

With a fervent wish that she might be able to walk, not to Jerusalem, but a great part of her way to Eastham on the morrow, Lucy swallowed the nauseous stuff.

"Thank you," she said humbly.

"Oh, don't 'ee be after thanking me! I done it," and here another curious look crossed her face—"I done it for the boy's sake. Come here, Dickey. Why, laddie, you'm nought but skin and bone!"

Watching Mrs. Brown and her boy, who, with a large piece of bread and treacle which the former had given him, seemed perfectly happy and content to be sitting on the lap of his new friend, a dreamy sort of unconsciousness stole over Lucy. Although she persistently kept her eyes wide open, she could no longer see objects distinctly; a cloud of mist ever and anon obscured them. The sun was shining brightly without, slanting the

reflection of its bright beams right across the spot which, perhaps being the warmest in the room, Mrs. Brown had chosen for herself and the child. Sometimes Lucy saw them distinctly ; sometimes they faded completely away from her strained vision, and it was only by a strong mental effort that she could force her mind to take in their forms again. But even this effort soon became impossible, for her heavy eyelids seemed to be dragged downwards by some irresistible power that she had not the strength to withstand. She strove to shake it off, strove to rise, but she could not move ; and as well as her failing, bewildering senses would let her, she called with affright on Mrs. Brown. But her voice had lost its power, and scarcely sounded above a whisper.

Yet Mrs. Brown, who had been watching her cautiously, heard it, and came and stood beside her, and bent down to catch the two ever-repeated words of "My boy ; my boy !" which came in loving yet apprehensive accents from Lucy's lips. The clasp of her hand, hard and rough as it was, appeared to soothe

Lucy, for soon she ceased to murmur her fears; and though every now and then she lifted her weary eyelids, she remained passive and quiet.

She hears still the hum of Mrs. Brown's voice, and the childish prattle of little Dickey's; but she cannot catch or put together in her deadened brain the words they are saying.

Her senses become more numbed. She is fading away, though she knows it not, into unconsciousness; even the feeling, which has clung to her hitherto, of fear for her boy, has left her, and she remembers him no longer; he has ceased to trouble her. A sound of whistling from without—a short, shrill whistle—disturbs her. She moves restlessly, the while Mrs. Brown unclasps her hand and goes softly out.

Lucy remains quiet and passive. She is not yet unconscious of passing sounds, and——is she dreaming, or does she really distinguish the muffled noise of wheels in the distance? They cease, and the street door opens and closes. Oh, God! *is* she dreaming; or does she indeed hear the

rustling of a dress on the stairs? No, no; she is not dreaming; the sound is distinct. She feels—she sees through the cloudy mist floating before her eyes, the proud form, the cold hard look of her rival's face; and frantically she once more strives to rise. It is in vain; she cannot. She is as though bound hand and foot, and cannot fight against the stupifying effects of the powerful drug she has taken.

She is speaking—that rival; speaking cutting, cruel words, which she revengefully believes will in a measure redress the shameful wrong she imagines she has suffered, may still suffer, through Lucy. She bends her face nearer. But Lucy is past catching the sense of her words; even her eyes now no longer distinguish her form. It assumes a ghostly semblance; it fades and vanishes. It is gone. Ah, God! what is that? A cry from her boy? It is the last sound Lucy hears as she sinks into a sleep, the living semblance of death.

* * * * *

It is evening; damp, murky, and a

drizzling rain falling. Those whose business obliges them to be in the streets are hurrying onwards, picking their way through the mud and filth. Others, careless of it, wade through the dirtiest places, all too much intent on their own concerns, or finishing the business which makes it a necessity that they should be abroad, to take much heed to what is passing around them. Thus a woman, young and scantily attired, with a fevered look which had in it something approaching to a mixture of agony and wildness, something beyond the look which want or hunger stamps the face with, brushed roughly past a pedestrian, who had barely time to resent the rudeness before the dim outline of her figure alone was visible, so swiftly she went.

It is Lucy!

She has awoke from her death-like sleep, awoke to the full measure of her anguish, awoke to find her boy gone!

But for her love for him, her overwhelming love, her senses would have fled. They wander at times; they are wandering now, or surely she would never have

started forth to look for him with no clue to guide her save that of instinct, and the knowledge, which she never doubts, that Anna has stolen him whilst she slept. She feels strangely bewildered as she presses on; and every now and again she carries her hand to her brow and sweeps her thin fingers across it, as though to clear its wandering sense or stay it.

She goes on—onwards, through streets she has never trodden before, through by-ways she knows not. She will not tire. She will not slacken her speed. A mother's strength supports her, a mother's fear and agony clench her heart.

The evening grows darker. The lamps, as she passes beneath them, alone show her figure, still hurrying onwards, for it is but for a moment they light on her, and she is gone, and a man's figure, walking as swiftly, flashes past. He is following her, though she knows it not; if she did she would hurry the faster. He seldom loses sight of her. Once he calls her by name, but she hears him not; she is, as it were, dead to all and every sound, save the sound of her own heart, which seems with

every beat to breathe the name of her boy.

The minutes speed on, but Lucy knows no fatigue. There is no rest for her; can be none. Her heart urges her to fresh exertions. There will be no rest for her until she has found, if only in imagination, her lost boy. She has in her wanderings left the by-streets, and is emerging into the crowded thoroughfare. She is rushing on, when a child's distant cry startles her. In her heated, distempered imagination it is Dickey—little Dickey, her lost one, calling for help. Madly she rushes onwards now. Her brain is on fire; her pulses throbbing wildly. She looks from right to left. She calls, in her hot anguish and frenzy—calls aloud, "My boy! my boy!" but even echo does not take up the sound and softly waft back what she might have mistaken for the feeble cry of her child. More swiftly still she flies, and now in the gaslight she sees the river shining murkily, and, as she fancies, mockingly. In a moment she is on the bridge, and swiftly descending some steps at the side. She hears a

voice—a cry ; and to her disordered imagination it is a fresh cry for help from her child. But it is the voice of the man who has followed her since she started ; it is he who calls aloud, and in horrified accents, upon her to stop.

But he is too late. The quivering of the water as its surface reflects the distant gas-lamps she imagines to be the despairing struggles of her boy, and with one wild cry she rushes undauntedly to his help, and the waters close greedily, swiftly, and darkly over her.

CHAPTER X.

FOUND !

Then a booth of mountebanks,
 With its smell of tar and planks,
 And a girl poised high in air
 On a cord, in spangled dress,
 With a faded loveliness,
 And a weary look of care.

Longfellow.

WE must turn once more to Eastham and to Miss Gathorne, who is sitting by the fire (for the weather is as cold at Eastham as elsewhere), reading a letter from Joe :

“DEAR MADAM,—

“I have found Lucy! I have seen her! She is miserable and unhappy. She is in a wretched lodging, *alone* with her child; and although I have watched outside hour after hour, I have not dared go near her. I feel my knees give way

and my heart beat at the thought of it. Will she think it an insult my seeking her out? I cannot tell; I do not know what to do. I am tormented with doubts. If I could believe she would be glad to see me I would intrude upon her. Or if I thought that scoundrel—curse him!—had left her in want, I would brave all to help her. Can you advise anything?

“I am, dear Madam,

“Yours respectfully,

“JOSEPH SIMMONDS.

“P.S.—Mrs. Leslie has been to Lucy’s to-day. What can this mean? Advice is of no use. I dare not see Lucy now. I shall keep watch. I enclose her address.”

“Fool!” exclaimed Miss Gathorne, crumpling up the letter; “fool! And this is the man I thought possessed a kind of bulldog courage. Why, he was the nearest approach to a villain that I ever saw. Ah! this comes of my making a gentleman of him. He *thinks* and *considers*, and *believes* and *imagines*, and *curses*; and while he is thinking and considering,

and believing and imagining and cursing, Lucy will go hang!" said she in a passion, throwing the letter on to the fire.

But in another second she darted at it and snatched it, before it was little more than slightly singed, and, carefully doubling it together again, placed it in its envelope. In five minutes more she had put on her bonnet and waterproof and gone out.

She was soon on her way to Anne Campbell's, whom, as a *dernier ressort*, she had resolved on seeking. I do not know whether in sober moments, or on more mature reflection, she would have taken this step; but the danger to Lucy was imminent, or she believed it to be so; and she acted, as she usually did, on impulse, and, as she firmly believed, for the best, without for one moment weighing the for or against.

No misgivings crossed her mind as she started for Anne's, her mind being too full of fears for Lucy, and too anxious to find means of sending her aid of some sort or another. But she had not gone half-way before a number of doubts began

to trouble her, one after the other; though had a lion glared at her in her path, I believe she would not have turned from it, so obstinate was she when once she had made up her mind to a thing.

She had not met Anne since that day so long ago when she had come to "The House" to brave and taunt her with Lucy's fall; and it was some little comfort to Miss Gathorne to remember this, and to know that the news she carried was no news at all to Anne, and that, in fact, she knew almost as much as she could tell her. But it *was* a sore touch to her pride and obstinacy to have to seek Anne, and thus in a measure succumb to her—almost allow that she had been wrong; to hear doubts cast upon her nephew's honour, and not be able scornfully to throw them back, or retaliate, which would have suited her better. Her heart, usually so brave, beat uncomfortably as she pushed open the gate leading into the Nursery, and beat more tumultuously still as she turned the handle of the house door. Her step was actually unsteady as she walked into the little

parlour, where Anne usually sat of an afternoon, nerving herself to meet cold contemptuous looks.

But she met with no cold contemptuous looks, for Anne's face was bowed down over her hands in all the abandonment of sorrow or despair, while by her side, standing grimly and, as Miss Gathorne thought, angrily, was Farmer Simmonds.

"Good-day, ma'am," he said, when he saw her.

The sound of his voice roused Anne. She looked up, and Miss Gathorne was shocked at the agonized expression of her face.

"What is it?" asked the latter, glancing from one to the other.

And then the thought that Farmer Simmonds had heard all about Lucy from Joe flooded her heart, and she sat down in a chair near, totally unable to support her trembling limbs any longer.

"I am glad you've come, ma'am," said he; "for you can judge betwixt her and me. I've just asked her to be my wife, and she's—well, dazed at it, for it's set us talking of things that well-nigh

broke her heart and mine years gone by. Things," said he, "that touch you, ma'am, as well as her and me."

Anne moaned, and covered her face afresh with her hands.

"Can't you let bygones be bygones?" said Miss Gathorne, with a deep sigh, yet severely.

"No, ma'am, I can't! I'm forced to speak out. What I've been telling her is this, that I don't want to excuse my conduct a bit, nor I don't want to speak against the dead; but truth will out, come what will; and it was all along of John Campbell that I did as I done. He was hard and gnashed at me like, for letting fly against Anne's sister; and I won't deny but what I did let fly against her, 'twas a heinous sin in my eyes, always has been, for any girl to bring shame against those as owns her. All the village wagged their heads and chaffed me about it, and when they'd shamed me like, John Campbell comes down upon me, and we got to words, and I damned him and his sister, and Anne and the whole lot of 'em. And the upshot of it all was

I gone and got married in a desperate fit, and repented of it when 'twas too late."

"It's years ago," said Miss Gathorne, seeing Anne did not speak.

"'Tis so," replied the farmer; "but it seems to me only yesterday now that I come to stand once more by Anne's side. I feel as I felt the last time we parted, and I took her in my arms and kissed her. Anne!" said he bending over her, "I'm here by your side where I ought to have been let come long since, asking you to forgive me, and take me back to your heart; mine has never swerved from you; and I swear no woman has ever made it beat as you make it beat now, since the day, the miserable day we parted."

"Hush! your wife!" murmured Anne.

"God rest her soul! there never was a more gentle creature; she had no wilful ways like you had as a girl, but I couldn't love her for all that; and though I strove to hide it from her she found it out, and never gave me a harsh word for it, nor so much as upbraided me for the sin I done in making her my wife. Anne! when she was dying she told me how she'd been

to see you, and how she'd asked you to be a mother to her unborn child, for she never doubted but what you'd be my wife afore long. She've been dead more nor twenty years now, but one on 'em hadn't slipped by afore I'd been and asked John to give you to me as wife."

Anne started.

"'Tis true," continued he, "gospel true. All the same he and I parted worse-minded to one another; and I never so much as looked him in the face after that. But I've felt my heart go out to you, Anne, and crave for you till I've been nigh frenzied. Many's the time I've walked the road outside, just to get a glimpse of the light shining in your window, or felt a sort of thrill like when your gown have touched me as you comed into church, and I haven't been able to say my prayers for the bad thoughts I've had against those as parted us. Anne, forgive me, and be my wife?"

But Anne shook her head.

"Ma'am," said he, appealing to Miss Gathorne, "you'll speak for me I know. Isn't it all along of your brother that has

given us all this misery? ma'am, my home's a hell since Joe left! I'm that lonesome and miserable, and my heart feels fit to break. Oh Anne, for God's sake have mercy on me!" and he once more took her hand in his.

But she shook it away from him.

"I daren't! I daren't," she cried; "think of Lucy!"

"I do think of Lucy," replied he; "but, Anne, I tell you there isn't nothing short of death can turn me from you. My son's never been the same since he lost the girl, and if I'd known—if I'd only known his heart was like mine, I'd have helped her to him with all my heart. If she's been sinful as you say she has; why it isn't through no fault of yours, that I'll stake my oath on," and he set his lips sternly as he said it. "But mind you, as I telled you before, I think you was all too hard on the girl, that's what sent her to the wall, and got that scoundrel—saving your presence, ma'am — a-hankering after her."

"You mean my nephew," said Miss Gathorne, boldly: "well, I don't mean to

defend him. He may be guilty, though I've no proof as yet."

"I'm sure he's guilty," said Anne.

"It runs in them Gathornes," said the farmer. "Why hadn't you told Lucy 'bout her mother and the old squire? It would have, may-be, kept the girl straight; least of all would she have taken up with t'squire's nephew."

"It would have killed her," said Miss Gathorne.

"Tut, tut," replied the farmer; "why I telled her myself that her mother was—was—no better than she ought to be," said he correcting himself; "telled her when she was, as I thought, sweethearting with Joe."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," said Miss Gathorne.

"Well I did feel sort of queer after I telled her; she took it so gentle like. Well, it's all past and gone now; and don't I tell you, Anne, that I'm a changed man, changed in all but one thing. Anne, won't you give me no hope at all?"

"Would it be vengeance," returned Anne, "if I were to tell you to continue

to 'walk in the light of your own fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled'? All the same 'tis too late to ask for hope. 'Hope deferred maketh the heart sick,' and mine have been sick unto death for years gone. I'll wait for Lucy. She'll be coming back broken-hearted one of these days; and though I shame to say it, my heart yearns after her and won't be comforted."

There was silence for a moment or two after Anne had spoken, broken only by the farmer's heavy step as he went to the window and turned his back upon the two women. Now was Miss Gathorne's time. She leant forward and touched Anne; "Send him away," she said.

But Anne shrank back from her touch, "Why for?" she asked, giving Miss Gathorne one of the cold contemptuous looks the latter had dreaded.

But Miss Gathorne in her capacity of listener had recovered her courage wonderfully.

"Don't look at me like that," she said, "I've found Lucy! There, don't tremble, but send the man away."

But whatever the farmer's thoughts had been busy with, he no longer chose to remain alone. Once more he stood near Anne.

"I'll go and know no rest until I've found Lucy. I *will* find her if she's to be found," said he; "and then Anne, *she* shall judge between us."

"No! no!" and Anne trembled exceedingly, "you mustn't do it. It's no use. I know where she is, and—and—I'll go myself."

"Never, Anne! I'll go with you. Where is she?"

Anne looked at Miss Gathorne.

"I won't tell," said the latter, "not as long as Mr. Simmonds is in the room."

"You will, ma'am," said he.

"I won't!"

"If you don't, ma'am, I'll hunt your nephew down as I would a dog! 'Tis time them Gathornes was brought to book."

"Hush!" said Anne; "it cannot concern you, George; but it concerns me nearly. Ma'am, it is of no use hiding

things that all the village will know before long. Where is Lucy?"

"I won't say before him. No, I won't! If the men of my house have not been famous for—for good, the women have always been obstinate in the cause of good. Do you suppose I'm going to tell you, Mr. Simmonds, *you* who have been scandalous enough to court a woman before my very face. No, indeed! you ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"I ain't ashamed of my love for Anne; and those as had a hand in parting us ought to have a hand in bringing us together again. 'Tis you and yours as ought to be ashamed I'm thinking; a-ruining those as can't help themselves, or is too simple-minded to resist temptation," said the farmer hotly.

"Hush!" said Anne again. "'Upon the ungodly the Lord shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, storm and tempest; this shall be their portion to drink.' Let the wicked be, what have we to do with them? What profit is there in my blood or yours? Let us consider her whose eye is consumed for very heaviness, yea, soul

and body, and who has become a reproof even amongst her neighbours. Ma'am, I can have no secrets now from him. Where is Lucy?"

But Miss Gathorne still resisted; and it was only after a severe cut from Anne Campbell that she eventually gave in and produced Joe's letter, which, as the farmer said, convinced him more than ever that he ought to have a finger in the pie, and bear a helping hand to Joe.

A stormy discussion ensued, but Anne held firm to her resolve of seeking Lucy alone, and without the help of the farmer; a resolve eagerly approved of by Miss Gathorne, who urged immediate and decisive action.

But there was little need of this. Anne was not one to be slow at doing a good deed; besides, her heart clave, as it were, to Lucy; had gone out to her long since, and not in anger or scorn, but in love, pity, and tenderness. Her former lover's words had broken the hard crust that had fenced round her heart, and she felt as though she could afford to be at peace with all the world.

When Miss Gathorne left the cottage, Anne was hurriedly getting together the few things necessary for an immediate start, while the farmer was hanging about the doorway with the dim hope that he might even yet be allowed to accompany her on her journey.

“What fools are there like old fools?” exclaimed Miss Gathorne, angrily, to herself, as she marched homewards. “He’s fifty and she’s past forty. Both old enough to know better. But they won’t. They’ll grow bigger fools yet. Why I’d as soon have thought of having an offer of marriage myself as that cold, angular, disagreeable woman having one,” and she laughed and chuckled at the idea her thought had suggested. “Only think, after all these years, of Farmer Simmonds going and making an ass of himself! Well, well; there certainly *are* no fools like old fools!” and once more she laughed and chuckled as she went on her way along the road, instead of the short cut across the fields which she had previously taken.

Just as she reached the middle of the

lane a noisy sound of men's voices, and of hammers and falling planks, struck upon her ears. It was an unusual sound in the quiet village of Eastham, and Miss Gathorne looked about her in wonderment. What could the sounds mean? She quickened her steps, and at the turn of the road, in a field to the right, just skirting the village, she came upon a scene of such bustle and life that involuntarily she stood still in her surprise.

The field in one corner near at hand was dotted with human beings, all apparently busy. There were women cooking before a fire; there were children and grown girls cleaning and scouring the cooking utensils, or washing cups and saucers, plates and dishes. There were men unloading carts, others knocking together planks or fixing stakes into the ground. Horses and cattle feeding quietly; and, lastly, the canvas of a huge tent, which had just been hoisted into an upright position, flapping about in the wind.

Men, women, and children of Eastham had clustered together outside the hedge

to have a look at the strangers, and were elbowing each other and squabbling for the best place, while about a dozen yards further off from them and nearer Miss Gathorne leant the bride, Betsy Ernsle; her scarlet petticoat fluttering about, now here, now there, and her dress of some dainty colour tucked up high about it. A smaller hat than as Betsy Harold she had ever worn was on her head, scarcely shading her face; a bright ribbon spanning it and floating down even below her slim waist. She was looking eagerly and wonderingly on, first at one group and then at another, but most of all at a small child who was being taught to move her little feet to the time of a violin played by a man in a shabby, almost tattered attire. Now he stopped and beat time with his hand, now he laid down his musical instrument and scolded, but in so soft and pleasant a voice that the child only smiled gravely as she renewed her dancing. She was miserably thin; Betsy quite shuddered as she glanced at the bony legs, and thin, careworn-looking, pinched face, where the smile seemed not

only out of place, but positively woe-begone.

But her attention was by-and-bye diverted from the child by the appearance of a guadily painted open van, a mixture of red and yellow, which was being dragged out from amongst the carts, and to which were presently harnessed four thin, raw-boned horses, with tawdry faded trappings. Then Betsy had to move her position to allow of the gate being flung wide open. A number of men took their seats in the van, which started forwards amidst the deafening din of a badly played lot of musical instruments, the band of the strolling strangers.

Betsy's eyes literally blazed with excitement as she stepped on one side to allow the van to pass, which did not lessen when one of the men, apparently the leader, attracted by the girl's beauty, leant over the side and doffed his cap, bordered with a gold band, to her. He was a handsome man, and so Betsy thought as she curtsied and blushed back his greeting, and had not done blushing when she caught sight of Miss Gathorne.

Then a curious expression crossed her speaking features, a mixture of pride, arrogance, annoyance, and defiance.

"Good-day, ma'am," said she, dropping a curtsy. "Ain't they lovely?"

"They! *Him* you mean. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Mrs. Erns-lie!"

"Oh law there! I ain't a bit ashamed o' myself, sin' I took your advice an' got married, ma'am—for 'twas your advice, you know—I can do a deal more things, an' go about a deal more nor when I was Betsy Harold. Women as ain't married, be they never so old, arn't no call to be a-lecturing us married folks, nor a-telling us what we ought an' what we oughtn't to do. Where 'tis a shame for a lass to be a-galawanting, 'tis all right an' proper for us married uns to be skying about."

"Skying about, indeed! Do you call it skying about to be leering, and winking, and blinking at that great ruffian, with his hairy face yonder; riding in a thing that reminds me of a Babylonish chariot?"

"And a very handsome charrot 'tis to my mind; fit for the Prince o' Wales to be

a-airing o' hisself in. My stars an' garters! 'ouldn't I like to be one o' them fellows a-riding about wi' the music a'most driving me mad wi' pleasure, an' all the girls a-admiring o' me!"

"A man indeed! Faugh!" said Miss Gathorne, contemptuously.

"Oh, 'tis all very well to be skeering at 'em, but shouldn't I like to have my own mind in everything, an' go a-roaming all over the world till my eyes grew tired wi' looking at grand sights. Ah," said Betsy, with a sigh, "who'd bury themselves alive an' they could help it, a-wearing their hearts an' their lives away, an' getting nothing at all for their pains? I know I was made for summut grand, that I do!" said she, tossing her head consequentially.

"How long have you been married, Mrs. Ernsle?" demanded Miss Gathorne, severely.

"About a fortnight," said Betsy, carelessly.

"And what will it be, or what will be the state of things when you've been married a month?"

“Oh, much the same as ’tis now. I never counts the days, ma’am, nor I never looks forrard. Jacob minds the forge, an’ I minds myself.”

“And a very bad minding it is. I’m surprised that Jacob, knowing your evil propensities, should allow you to come out by yourself, when there is such an ungodly lot about.”

“Ungodly! Well, I wish I was ungodly then! for I likes the looks o’ every man jack o’ ’em; an’ they’re a dancing lot, too, an’ I never can keep my feet still when I sees others a-doing o’ their steps. Why there’s ever such a little kid over there, a-pointing o’ her toes an’ a-learning to dance. An’ I can do it better nor she wi’out the larning—a sight better,” said Betsy, enviously.

“Better go and try, and I’ll send Mr. Ernslic to see and applaud. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, as I said before; ashamed to let your eyes rest on them for one minute. What are they doing here at Eastham? I suppose they have got a wild beast show,” said Miss Gathorne, contemptuously.

“Oh law no, ma’am! nothing so tame as that. They’m—*circus wenches!*” and Betsy’s eyes sparkled with merriment; “*circus wenches*, ma’am! same as you said I was.”

“Circus! Scandalous!”

“Oh no it ain’t scandalous, ma’am. Jacob’s going to take me to it hisself this very night. He’s seen lots o’ ’em, an’ he says the girls ride on the bare backs o’ horses, wi’ one leg straight up in the air an’ t’other on its werry tip toe, like this,” said Betsy, throwing her body into position and speaking fast in her excitement; “and then they got a long stick in one hand, a-covered over wi’ lots o’ sparkles,” and before Miss Gathorne was aware of her intention, she had taken that lady’s well-kept umbrella out of her hand and poised it above her head. “Look! don’t it look lovely? But wait, I ain’t quite right, ’cause t’other arm is a-beckoning in the air. There! that’s it; Jacob said I did it beautifully. Oh I wish I had a big horse a-galloping under me and a gown o’ gold an’ silver on, an’ white satin shoes an’ silk stockings.”

“Give me my umbrella you good-for-nothing slut! You will break your husband’s heart before you’ve done, or end your days on a dunghill. Give me my umbrella, I say!”

But Betsy had described a circle, and with a step somewhat resembling a horse’s gallop, was swiftly going round it with the umbrella gracefully held or waved about her head. Her other arm was (as she described it) now beckoning the air, now akimbo, and now taking off her hat she waved it aloft in her excitement, until fairly out of breath she could go on with her performance no longer.

“There!” said she, laughing, “’tain’t so bad, is it? An’ don’t it make you warm just? Why, I’ll put a lot o’ shillings in Jacob’s pocket, for I shan’t want no fire time as I get home. Here, ma’am! here’s your umbrella; thanks for the loan o’ it. ’Tain’t come to no harm, save what’s got by being held in my wicked fingers. Oh, you needn’t look like that, I know I’m wicked, an’ I know there ain’t no place bad enough, but what I shall go to it one o’ these days.”

“I don’t pretend to know where you’ll go to, Mrs. Ernslic; but as long as you behave in so scandalous a way, it is very certain you are not in the way that will take you to a good place. There is such a thing as a fiery conscience,” said Miss Gathorne.

“I wonder whether it curls itself ’bout same as them fiery serpents does as Jacob brought fro’ Northborough t’other day. Have you ever seen them, ma’am? No! Well, they’re same size o’ a wasp, an’ when you puts a light to ’em there comes a wriggling snake, ’most as long as my arm, out o’ ’em; an’ if you touches ’em they goes to so much ashes. Oh, my! there’s the band again!” said Betsy, darting round so as to face the direction from which the sounds proceeded.

Miss Gathorne prepared for a start homewards.

“Ain’t you coming, Mrs. Ernslic,” she said sternly.

“What! when I can hear them beautiful sounds for nothing? No, indeed, ma’am! but you needn’t bide. ’Cause, you see, married folks is different to single,

an' don't mind a lot o' hairy-faced fellows staring at 'em. Good-day. I can take care of myself, ma'am," and Betsy dropped a farewell curtsy.

"She's worse, fifty times worse, than before she was married—a brazen-faced hussy!" said Miss Gathorne, wrathfully pursuing her way.

On came the van, with its occupants still noisily playing their instruments. As it drew near Miss Gathorne she angrily put up her umbrella.

CHAPTER XI.

“OH HEART! POOR HEART!”

Be still, be still, poor human heart,
 What fitful fever shakes thee now?
 The earth's most lovely things depart,—
 And what art thou?
 Thy spring than earth's doth sooner fade,
 Thy blossoms first with poison fill;
 To sorrow born, for suffering made,
 Poor heart! be still!

Eleanora Louisa Hervey.

NOT an hour after Miss Gathorne left the Nursery, Mr. Simmonds and Anne were seen on their road to the railway station. He accompanied her much against her will.

“Folks will talk,” she said.

“Let ’em!” he answered, snapping his fingers.

And folks not only talked, but stood still in surprise, forgetting even to give ‘Good-morrow’ to these two, who, after more than twenty years of estrangement,

and, it was believed, bitter feeling, were apparently walking together as though no cause had ever come between them to separate them, and they now as good friends as they had ever been. But this last was a stretch of the imagination, as Anne, well aware of the curious looks of her neighbours, was cold and reserved in the extreme, answering the voluble talk of her companion with monosyllables, and allowing him to perceive, as much as she could, that his company had been forced upon her greatly against her will.

Arrived at the station, she peremptorily forbade his accompanying her further; and it was with a sorrowful, almost foreboding heart he saw her depart.

"Won't you say one kind word, Anne? Something as I can take home wi' me as comfort, till such time as I see you again?"

Anne turned away her head, and tried to lean away out of his sight in a corner of the carriage; but he held the hand she had placed in his as she said "Good-bye" tightly, and looked so earnestly at her that, in spite of the coldness she had

assumed, she felt it impossible to let him go without a word.

"Let the past be as it had never been, George," she said.

"Yes, some of it; but not all?" he replied anxiously and questioningly.

"It had best be all," she said slowly. "There! let go my hand. That's the whistle!"

Reluctantly he let it go, and the train moved slowly off; and with a deep sigh Mr. Simmonds watched it speed away out of sight. He went homewards with the conviction that he had achieved nothing by his morning's confession to Anne. She had promised nothing, revealed nothing, concerning the state of her feelings towards him. Yet, when she returned, whether she brought Lucy or not, he would go over the self-same arguments with her again—that is, if she would let him. Let him! He switched viciously at the hedges with his stick. She *should* listen to him! Was the one false step of his youth to hang by him all his life, and never be wiped out? Surely he and Anne had both expiated his rash folly by twenty

years of hopeless misery; for that she no longer cared for him he dared not—would not credit, however much his heart might falter and sink, when now hope once more rose buoyant.

As for Anne, when the train hid her old lover from her sight, she felt for the moment a keen sense of freedom and relief.

When he had entered her cottage that morning she had met him with cold, almost disdainful self-possession. His voice had faltered, but hers had shown no sign of quavering. The hand he had stretched out towards her had trembled, but hers lay in his quiet and passive. His lips had quivered when, for the first time after long years, he stood face to face with her, and named her name; but hers were compressed and steady. And yet after a while his voice steadied, his hands no longer shook, nor his lips quivered as they gave utterance to the long pent-up feelings of his heart; yet Anne, like a true woman, had succumbed and washed away her coldness in an agony of tears. His truth and devotion touched her, and

in the end she had only a feeling of humble forgiveness, with a quiet sense of perfect peace. She had loved him all her life, hard and pitiless as she had schooled herself to be; and now, after all these years, he had come to upset her theory, to refute her fixed belief in his falseness, and lay the blame, gently, on her brother. Had her lover been more sinned against than sinning? and why had her brother been so bitter against him, and allowed every chance of her happiness to flit quietly, and yet, on her part, with how many despairing heart-sinkings?

Had John been alive Anne would have sternly taxed him with his duplicity; as it was she found herself, as the train speeded on, allowing her thoughts to dwell on him with animosity, and the hardness that had been in her heart till now towards her lover, seemed to be fast circling round her brother's memory.

She started guiltily as she suddenly found herself judging him harshly, and cried aloud, as though to drown the echo of her thoughts, "He is dead, let my

memory of him not be one of harshness and anger."

Thus she put away thoughts of her youth, and brought them to bear on Lucy and Lucy's child; and some of the fears which had crept about Miss Gathorne took hold of her.

The train was speeding rapidly, yet Anne impatiently looked at the outline of the hedges and banks as they shot past her, and wished that, if it were possible, they might flit more swiftly. True, Joe was watching over Lucy, and could any harm happen to her while he was by? In fancied security Anne tried to calm her anxious thoughts; but the calm was but momentary, for she relapsed again and again into fresh fears and anxieties, and the journey came to an end before her thoughts had settled themselves into anything definite as to the course to be pursued.

Lucy must be rescued! Lucy must be soothed and comforted! This was her last thought as she alighted from the cab at the door of Lucy's wretched lodging, and, with carpet-bag on the pavement beside

her, dismissed the cab, and saw it drive off; then, lifting the bag in her hand, she stepped forward and accosted Mrs. Brown, who, with arms akimbo, was standing at her door talking to a neighbour.

"A young 'ooman and a child!" shouted Mrs. Brown in answer to Anne's trembling inquiry; "lots on 'em all over Lunnun, ma'am. What's the name?"

"She's fair, very fair," replied Anne hurriedly, evading the question as to name.

"Thin?"

"No. Oh no."

"Don't know no such person, ma'am," replied Mrs. Brown, who had reasons of her own for not wishing to admit Anne; "best ax next door;" and she turned her back.

But here the neighbour stepped to the rescue.

"Bless yer, Mrs. Brown, there ain't no 'ooman nor child there. There's one as 'as seven about her, but it can't be she; and this side's mine, and I've got a cripple and 'is wife as gives me more trouble nor enough; they belongs to this winder 'ere,"

said she, pointing one out; "and winder top of this is a widdy, and top of that again——"

"Thank you," said Anne, interrupting her; "but I'm sure this is the house, No.——"

"Sure enough, ma'am, 'tis," returned the woman. Then, suddenly, "Lord! Mrs. Brown, 'tis that there——"

"Yes," said Mrs. Brown, interrupting her with an inward curse for not heeding the sundrywinks she had been favouring her with; "'Tis that young 'ooman, most likely. Step this way; ma'am. Look out for the stairs; 'tis very dark. Second floor front."

"Shall my Sammy carry your bag, ma'am?" called the neighbour, as Anne stepped into the dark passage.

"Mind yer own affairs, Mrs. Barrett, ma'am. I'll carry the bag myself," said Mrs. Brown, in a tone of voice meant to check all further advances in that quarter; and, followed by Anne, she went up the stairs and knocked at the door of Lucy's room.

One knock followed another from Mrs. Brown's strong fist, but no timid voice responding to the summons, she looked at

Anne, who stood trembling with excitement in every joint.

“ I take it she’s out,” she said, surlily, making a step towards Anne and the stairs.

“ Would not the door be locked ? ” said Anne.

“ Oh, I never meddles with my lodgers ; nor I never tries their doors ; ” and again she made a forward movement.

But Anne stood her ground.

“ She is my niece,” she said ; “ she is in trouble and needs my help, and I will help her ; ” and she stretched forth her hand, put Mrs. Brown firmly but gently on one side, and turned the handle of the door.

Contrary to her expectations it yielded to her touch.

“ Bring the bag,” she said, mechanically, to Mrs. Brown, as with sinking heart she moved onwards.

But in vain she looked for Lucy. One glance round the miserable room convinced her that it was tenantless.

Anne shivered, not only with disappointment, but with the cold, which on the opening of the door blew icily through some cracked and broken panes of glass in the window.

But though the room was tenantless the bed looked as though some one had very hastily arisen from it, for its worn and tattered covering was lying tossed together on the floor; a chair was upset, as also some articles of clothing.

"Gone! gone!" murmured Anne, clasping her hands together despairingly.

But Mrs. Brown, who had followed Anne closely, and was peering with lynx-like eyes over her shoulder, now spoke,—

"Well, I never! No, I never!" said she; "'tis enough to make a body 'ave no charity, nor no nothing! I takes in a young 'ooman and 'er starving hinfant, and goes so far as to let 'er 'ave this 'ere room on tick as you may say: and what does she do? Why she mizzles direcky my back's turned. She must 'ave 'ooked it precious sharp when I went out to buy that there penn'orth of 'baccy—curse 'er!"

"Oh, don't curse her!" said Anne; "I've plenty of money and 'll pay everything. She is only one of many sheep that have gone astray."

"I don't know nothin' about your sheep. She wor more like a she wolf arter that

there sickly brat of hers as she'd no business with at all," answered Mrs. Brown, angrily.

"Poor thing! poor thing!" sighed Anne, half unconsciously aloud.

What should she do? Seek out Joe? or remain where she was on the chance of Lucy's returning by-and-bye. While she hesitated Mrs. Brown once more spoke,—

"Well, ma'am, what be going to do? I take it yer 'ouldn't be after taking this 'ere room; though, for the matter of that, I can tidy it up so as yer shouldn't know it. 'Tis but a trifle I axes a week for it; but of course if I makes it genteel you must pay more," said Mrs. Brown, with an eye to the plenty of money Anne spoke of.

"I'll stay," said Anne, after a moment's consideration.

"Then I'll make a decent place of it. I'll 'ave a fire for'ee in a jiffey; and perhaps yer'd like the windy's mended. In course as you lets out it's yer niece, them as breaks pays."

"I want no fire, no anything," said Anne; then seeing the scowl on the woman's face, she added: "at least, not

yet. I want to hear all—all about—my niece."

"Oh! 'tain't much as I can tell yer, ma'am," answered Mrs. Brown, cautiously. "I knows nothing whatsumever about 'er; that I'll take my bible oath on! Not if you was to turn me inside out."

Anne pressed her hard; but Mrs. Brown stood her ground. She had plenty to say as long as a mere description only of Lucy was required; but beyond that Mrs. Brown was a wise woman and knew nothing, and Anne, finding it labour lost to question her, gave it up in despair.

Left to herself, Mrs Brown soon lit a fire and made the room, as she said, decent by placing sundry pieces of carpet here and there over the bare boards; she also nailed bits of cloth over the cracked glass, for it was growing dusk, and no glazier would leave his home to come out that time of the evening. As for the bed, tidy as Mrs. Brown said she had made it, Anne shuddered at the sight of it, as she sat down on the low seat where Lucy had so often hushed her fretful boy to sleep, and Mrs. Brown left her to herself and her thoughts,

with two thin candles to keep her company with their flickerings. Cold, comfortless, and miserable as the room was, it was clean; for Lucy, as long as her strength had lasted, had seen to that; but how could she, accustomed as she had been from her youth to warmth, and light, and comfort, have lived in it? Anne's heart not only sank, but grew into a kind of gloomy despair as she gazed around her. "Poor thing!" she whispered in accents of unutterable pity over and over again; and her innermost heart caught up the whisper and echoed it over and over again long after her lips had grown silent.

What had become of her? Where was she? Poor, starvingly poor, as Mrs. Brown had represented her, where had she gone forth, in what direction had she wandered in search of a home? Where was she? Would she come back? Oh, God help her wherever she is!

As Anne sat there waiting so wearily, oh! so wearily, not a thought of vengeance against him who had brought her niece to this strait overshadowed her mind. Her heart was full of Lucy. So near as she

had come, and yet to find herself, as it were, further off. It was all Lucy, nothing but Lucy.

Yet there was one coming swiftly onwards, with feet hastening to have vengeance, and heart burning with rageful anger. One whom Anne knew well, and whom Lucy, alas! had dreaded—even Anna Leslie.

She, after leaving Lucy on the day on which she had sought her out, had returned home, maddened with baffled jealousy, coldly hidden under a world of pride, yet ready to blurt out at the slightest touch. And the day had hardly waned ere Richard had touched it, and she had hurled forth at him the knowledge she had gained of his and Lucy's sin. Proud, disdainful, sarcastic, cuttingly so, she had goaded him to madness and he had—struck her!

Without another word they had parted; she to wreak her vengeance by (with Mrs. Brown's help) abducting Lucy's child: he to curse the hour in which he had ever met her!

After safely abducting Lucy's boy, Anna, her jealousy partly quelled, returned

home ; but in vain she waited for her husband,—waited so long that her jealousy blazed forth afresh, and maddened with waiting, she stole forth once again to Lucy's lodging, burning with the certain despair of finding Richard there. But only Anne Campbell sat keeping her weary watch by the fire.

"Who are you?" exclaimed Anna, in fiery tones, failing to recognise her.

Thus addressed Anne lifted her head.

"Mrs. Leslie!" she said in surprise.

"You know me?" said Anna, tossing back her veil.

"Certainly I know you, ma'am."

"And you?" demanded Anna, imperiously stamping down with her voice any disparaging doubts she might have as to the reason of her coming there.

"I am Anne Campbell. Lucy's aunt."

"So! What have you done with her? Where is she? No lies, woman."

"God knows where she is, ma'am; I don't," answered Anne.

"You cannot fool me; I am not to be fooled! I will know the truth," cried Anna, excitedly. "She has gone with

him, and you know it! You have countenanced it, woman; you know you have! But I am his wife: his wife, do you hear? and I will have vengeance—direful, hot, fearful vengeance! I will follow them both, and tear her from him! I will! I will!"

"Gone! Yes, she's gone," said Anne, bewilderingly; "gone long since."

"It cannot be long—no, no, it cannot be long! She was here, lying on that bed, not three hours ago. I saw her myself—saw her I tell you!" cried Anna, in excitement.

"Not three hours ago, and I have been sitting idling here!" exclaimed Anne. "Oh, what time has been lost! I might have found her! might have found her! Poor, poor Lucy! Poor girl!"

"Poor!" cried Anna. "She is wicked, base, deceitful! Woman, I wish she was dead!"

"It would be best so—best," murmured Anne. "Dead! gone where the 'wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest!' Rest for her, poor soul—rest for all. Oh, my God! what's that?"

It was a sound sweeping up from below, a scarcely definable sound; yet the murmur of it, whatever it was, swept warningly, as it were, through the still cold evening air, striking a nameless terror into Anne Campbell's soul. She had come not an hour ago so full of hope, which hope had been terribly disappointed; and she was now, with her long, weariful, mournful waiting, full of dismal thoughts and fears, and her heart ready to start and take fright at the least sound. She turned her eyes towards the door, and with lips parted and clasped hands and forehead drawn together in a sudden terror of expectation, and body leaning forward—waited.

Anna also waited; Anne's cry having entered her heart, not making it beat with kindred fear, for her form was never drawn up more proudly, nor had she ever looked more scornful than now. Her eyes flamed with fierce passion, and she would not have turned pale had her rival's mangled and bleeding corpse been borne past her.

So the two women stood, each in anxious expectation, but each with different feelings beating in her heart; one in almost agon-

ized expectation, wrestling with her fears; the other braving, daring everything.

And now a muffled noise on the stairs, a stumble, and the flapping or crushing of what might be the part of a woman's dress. Then again the footsteps came stumbling on.

And "Oh, my God!" whispered Anne once more; and more proudly yet she, who called herself Richard Leslie's wife, stood with head thrown back and lips curling with scorn.

The steps come near — nearer. The door is flung hastily open, and Richard, his dress all soaked and soiled and dripping with wet, comes staggering in, with Lucy's drooping and inanimate form clasped tightly in his arms.

Brushing past the two women, and against Anna, who rudely attempts to bar his way, he lays Lucy tenderly on the bed; and then, as though exhausted nature could bear no more, he drops on his knees by the bedside, his face hidden, and his arms thrown as it were protectingly across Lucy's body.

"it would be best so—best she was

dead," Anne Campbell had said but now ; and yet, when the trial had come upon her seemingly, she cried and rebelled against it in an extremity of anguish, almost for the time being numbing her faculties and depriving her of reason, or of the power of acting.

A confused sound of voices murmured up from below, but no one came to the aid of these two women thus suddenly brought into contact with the apparently dead and dying ; and for a moment or so they rendered no help ; one being powerless to do so, the other too fiercely angry.

At length Anne Campbell, crushed and stupified, dragged her trembling feet to Lucy's side, and with bewildered senses, and hands that scarce knew what they did, was with wonderful pity, and eyes that were raining tears, smoothing the wet, long, tangled masses of fair hair away from Lucy's brow. Oh, what a thin, sunken face it was, once so round and full of health ! What thin, lank arms, about which the worn, wet, dress clung ! What small, transparent hands ! Anne took them tenderly in hers, and smoothed each softly

and separately, wiping the moisture that clung about them carefully, and, as she did so, the wedding-ring—all too large for the shrunken finger—glittered and sparkled, as though rejoicing over the misery it had helped to accomplish. Anne's fingers lingered about the ring, and her eyes, through their blinding tears, strained again and again, as though wishing to be certain their sight had not failed them, while, for the first time since Lucy had been lost to her, her heart breathed comfort as it whispered, "She was more sinned against than sinning."

Oh heart! poor heart! What had it not suffered before such a dread strait as this had maddened it into despair! How must it have fought and struggled, battled and striven, and been torn with anguish! Was there none to save when rashly it had sought to hide its shame, or quench the agony burning within? None to pluck it back as it rushed to its end? Yes, there had been one, even he who had wrecked the young life, broken the loving heart, and trampled on every vow or promise he had sworn or given.

Why had he been too late? Oh, why had he not saved her? Why was he resting so near her now? He had wronged her in life, he should not rest near her in death.

So Anne lifted Richard's arms, and put them, not roughly, and yet scarcely gently, away; and they drooped over him, as now, the support gone, he lay, as it were, in a heap on the floor, and his wife stood coldly and unpityingly by, making no sign, no effort, to help him; while she who had loved him even unto death, had borne and suffered, God and she only knew how much, lay where he had placed her, powerless to help him now.

Oh heart! poor heart! Poor, loving, suffering, true heart! One of the many who year by year are cast away and hurried to an untimely end, not from anger, or hatred, or revenge, but because they have loved too well; loved and trusted where love and trust have not only been misplaced, but fatal.

Is trusting love to be rewarded like this? Are men to walk the earth unscathed and even unmarked, while those whom they

have driven to despair are rotting beneath their feet; scarce causing them a sigh or even a momentary thought, when the heart, stirred by some stray sound or scene, recalls, it may be, their lost image? Surely God in His own good time will wreak vengeance, demand restitution, for this shedding of blood. If earth's judges have no punishment for man, and only the woman, driven, it may be, to commit murder, and standing neglected, callous, and forlorn, is condemned, surely the Searcher of all hearts will punish, and that tenfold; for where she has sinned and suffered much, he has tempted, betrayed, and cast away.

"Oh heart! poor heart!" sighed Anne again, as in an utter abandonment of grief she suffered her head to droop downwards until it rested against Lucy's side.

But, ah! why does she start? Why does the blood rush swiftly over face and brow, flooding with crimson what but now had been stamped with a kind of hopeless paleness? Why does her loudly beating heart almost stand still, as she tremblingly yet eagerly listens for what she fancies is

a faint pulsation beating feebly against Lucy's side? Is she deceived, or has God indeed been merciful to Lucy, and not allowed the sin of suicide to stain her soul?

Once more Anne holds her breath and listens, and then she rouses to prompt, almost fierce action.

"Help! help!" she cries; "she is not dead!" and then a prayer rushes through her soul, a prayer for mercy, mixed with thankfulness and new-born hope.

But her cry, although it has failed to rouse the feeble heart so faintly and scarcely perceptibly pulsating, has roused not only Richard Leslie but Anna.

"It is false!" cried the latter, with scornful vindictiveness; "she *is* dead!"

"Now God forbid!" said Anne Campbell fervently.

"She is dead! She must be dead! Shall she live to work me further misery, goad me to more maddening jealousy? See!" said she, with derisive contempt pointing to Richard, "*he* rouses. It is she only who has the power to wake him."

"God forbid!" cried Anne again, as

she tenderly raised Lucy's head into a more comfortable position. "There, see! she moves. Oh, if you have a woman's pity, bring me help!"

"Me! I will not stir a finger to save her. Seek help yourself."

Anne looked at the angry wife, and crept closer to Lucy.

"Oh, I dare not leave her," she said; "and she is not dead. She may live—she will live, if only I could have help. Oh, lady, for God's sake, do something! Help me; help me! Oh, for the love of heaven, have pity."

"Pity! You don't know my heart. It never felt more stony."

"Woman!" cried Anne, in despairful rebuke, "have you no mercy?"

But Anna, with a lip curling with pride and scorn, had gone over to where Richard lay, as it were, confusedly gathering his shaken and benumbed senses together.

"Get up," she cried, "and come home. At least I, your wife, have a right to expect this of you."

"Go! This is no place for you," he said, falteringly.

What answer Anna would have given was prevented by Anne Campbell, who turned to him beseechingly, as her one, her only hope.

"Oh, sir! if you are a man, bring me help. Would you let a poor lost soul die? God knows I would not ask you could I get help without. See, she moves! If only I had help she would not die. Oh, you who have brought her to this dreadful strait, bring, seek help, and for God's sake be speedy."

"Help! Oh, my darling! my lost love!" murmured Richard, stumbling to his feet.

"You shall not touch her! You shall not!" cried Anna.

"Help, sir, help!" said Anne Campbell; "bring help!"

"If he does," said Anna, vindictively, "I will never see him more—never! We part from this hour! Choose, Richard Leslie! choose!"

"I have chosen. Out of my way! Stand off, lest I strike you dead with my words!"

But Anna clung to him desperately.

“You don’t know what fierce passions there are in my heart. Oh, Richard! Richard! take me with you. Let us go hence and leave her to her fate. I will be a good and loving wife from this time forth. I will never taunt you with her again, only come with me. Come!”

“I cannot; I dare not. Let go!” said he, growing stronger every moment.

“I will not let go! I will not! You shall not help her!” and she clung to him like a vice.

“Would you have me strike you again? Let go, I say. I will help her!” he cried, fiercely.

“Let her die. What is she to you?”

“Die! She shall not die! What is she to me? Oh, God, *she is my wife!*”

No longer Anna strove to bar his way. Stunned and bewildered she released her hold of him.

“It is not true,” she said, falteringly.

“*It is true.* God help us all!” he said, bitterly.

Was it true? God help her, was it true? He was gone, and she turned to Anne Campbell.

But when she would have spoken her tongue refused to utter words, and a film gathered over her eyes, and she groped as it were in darkness. She strove, she fought with the growing darkness, but all in vain ; the darkness grew darker, a cruel weakness crept over her, and with a sigh, half of pride, half of despair and horror, she drooped together in a heap on to the ground.

“God help us all !” murmured Anne Campbell, as she looked at her.

“And God help us all !” she murmured once again, as clasping Lucy’s hand, a sudden light from the fire flashed across the wedding-ring, lighting it up with a glittering brightness.

CHAPTER XII.

“MADNESS OR DEATH?”

Had it pleas'd heav'n
To try me with affliction ; had he rained
All kinds of sores and shames on my bare head ;
Steep'd me in poverty to the very lips ;
Given to captivity me and my utmost hopes ;
I should have found in some part of my soul
A drop of patience : but (alas !) to make me
A fixed figure, for the type of scorn
To point his low unmoving finger at,—
O ! O !

Shakespeare.

RICHARD'S tones had carried conviction with them, and Anne Campbell doubted no more.

Lucy was his wife, his true and lawful wife. He had said so. It had been wrung from him in a moment of passionate despair. But having said it, it remained as a beacon of light for Lucy to turn to ; as a knell of death to Anna. Would he, having asserted it, stand by it ? or would

he seek, when calm reflection came, to disprove it? Yet having allowed it, it must be sifted to its very core, and Anne never doubted the result. Lucy had not sinned, but she had suffered much; suffered and made no sign; had been silently faithful—faithful even almost unto death; faithful when he, her husband, had shamefully outraged her love, and forsaken her.

And she was his, this bad man's. Anne could lay no claim to her as she had thought to do, could not take her back to her home, for something seemed to whisper that now he had acknowledged her; now she could no longer screen his sin; she would follow, console, and comfort him wherever he might be. And Anne had scarce any feeling of gladness that Lucy's sorrows were over; but only one of unutterable love and pity as she bent over her; only one of shuddering horror as she glanced at the wretched Anna.

But Anna's swoon was not of long duration, for all too soon she awoke to the terrible despair and scarcely belief in the reality of Richard's fearful revelation. Had he said it to frighten and anger

her? to avenge himself for all the taunts and sarcasms with which she had twitted him lately? or had he been in earnest, in dreadful earnest? Was she no wife, but a thing she dared not name? She would have given way to a frenzy of grief but for Anne; have allowed the maddening despair of her soul to find vent for its choking anguish in cries and groans and delirious ravings. But her pride forbade it and gave her a sort of weak strength to stand her ground, and while there was a single straw—though it might be a breaking one—to cling to, still she would cling to it, still lug hope to her soul, and show little sign of the terrible devastation within.

Gathering herself up from the floor she turned to Anne Campbell, who once more essayed to hide Lucy from her gaze; though she could not stay the incoherent murmurs that were falling so piteously from the poor pale lips.

But if Anna heard the soft voice she took no heed.

"Tell Mr. Leslie, if he returns," she said, "that I have gone home, and await him there."

But the voice faltered, and its echoes were hollow and forced.

And again Anne Campbell crept closer to Lucy, and shuddered and thought of breaking hearts, and burning despair, and withering hopes hidden beneath a world of pride and scorn; and as she caught the sound of the trembling feet going away down the stairs, she thanked God that Anna was gone, and that she should see her no more.

“And *she* was his wife; his true and lawful wife.”

So Anna repeated to herself over and over again even as Anne Campbell had done, and repeated the words with a kind of stupified horror. He had loved this girl from first to last. His love for Anna had been but a sham, a deceit. She had never been his wife. Never! She never could be his wife. Never!

Why had he done this? In what had she deserved it?

She had loved him. Oh God! how had she not loved him! Could Lucy's love be put into comparison with hers? Could such a cold nature be for one moment

pitted against hers? Had Lucy not seen another usurp in the eyes of the whole world her place, her rightful place in his heart—in his life; and been content to give no sign, make not one single struggle, when in the end victory must have been hers? where was her jealousy? where her pride? Where her child's birth-right? Had she had either of these two first, or had she had a thought as to the latter? No, no; she had not. She had been content to be treated like a dog, to be deserted, neglected, dishonoured even; and yet he had said that she was his wife.

It was false! It could not be!

And yet—and yet if it was false, why had he sought Lucy out—and how had she come into the water? Had he found her; and had she fled from him, and sought to drown her sorrows in a watery grave? or had she missed her boy and, unable to learn tidings of him, become bereft of her senses? And had Richard followed her in her search for death, and though too late to prevent the rash act, come in time to save her and bear her

home to confront her with Anna, and wreck her peace of mind for ever?

Anna stood in the solitude of her own room, with clasped hands and staring eyes that looked as though smitten with horror, and an unutterable woe at her heart. She who had gone forth from the house but an hour before full of pride, and jealous fierce anger that nothing seemed able to quench, would willingly have sacrificed them now,—aye and grovelled in the dirt like a worm,—could such utter self-abasement have wiped out the hideous fact she had come to learn, and make her once more a wife, unloved—even hated; yet still a wife.

If she could have hidden his guilt from the world, not for his sake but for her own, she might have found some balm for her anguish. But it was a sin that could not be hidden, could not be glossed over; and ere long she would be a marked woman; the cynosure of all eyes wherever she went. Hers was not the sin, yet on her would fall, surely fall, part of the punishment. So it had been since the world began, so it would be to the world's

end; man sinned and dragged woman downwards. *He* might raise his head again and be recognised as of old; but she, never more! Brush off ever so lightly the down from the caught butterfly's wing, and you can never restore it to its pristine beauty again.

Anna clasped her hands until the nails entered and pierced the flesh; yet she felt no pain, none save the racking, gnawing agony—worse than any bodily pain—of her heart, so hard to bear.

"Oh be still! be still!" she cried; "let me not go mad. Let me think, though to think be madness!"

And she did think; she did nothing but think as the minutes crept by and found her still standing like a spectre, a ghost of her former self, transfixed as it were with some dreadful overwhelming horror.

Then by-and-bye, as though to remain quiet were intolerable, a new fancy possessed her, and she commenced walking to and fro in the room. But, however swiftly her feet might move, they brought no peace to her troubled soul, for it was a mortal agony she suffered.

She glanced at the clock; it was close upon seven o'clock, the very hour Richard had been wont to seek his room to dress for dinner. For a moment she almost waited in the expectancy of hearing his footfall, oblivious of her woe; then wrung her hands despairingly as she thought he would never come; never more!

Yet he might come. His words might have been false. Yes, he might come, repentant, and humbly craving forgiveness for the words he had hurled at her—words that were only meant to frighten and bring her proud heart into submission. Yes, he might come. Oh God! pray that he may! and that her agony may pass away as a frightful dream; a dream never to be forgotten, but a dream the remembrance of which will scare her all her life.

The clock chimes seven, and he has not come. She has not heard a sound below. Her ears have been eagerly listening and catching every sound, even to the creaking of the butler's steps as he goes to and fro the dining-room; but nothing more—nothing more.

Her first bitter anguish is over, and

despair is creeping on fast and surely. Shall she never see Richard more? Will he never come near her again? Will he not come and tell her whether his words were true or false? “*Oh God, she is my wife.*” Anna moans aloud in her despair; if she is his wife, then his home is with her; Anna has no right to him; he has no right to enter the roof where she is again. He is another’s. He is not hers; nay more, he cannot, he dare not, even clasp her hand, nor attempt to console her.

The clock chimes the quarter past, and finds her with the same thoughts sweeping through her. It chimes the half-hour, and she proudly flings aside her despair, and throws herself on the bed.

Scarcely a minute has passed ere her maid enters.

“I have a dreadful headache—Go! do not disturb me. Tell Mr. Leslie when he comes that I am here. He is dining out. There is no occasion to wait for him.”

She could not say the words again. She cannot think how she can have said them; for her breath is coming in short

quick gasps. She cannot lie there; she will choke.

Once more she is alone. Once more she is standing, looking more spectre-like than ever, in the middle of the room, her fingers pressed on her burning eyeballs, or tightly clasped across her heart.]

Oh, day of anguish! evening of horrors! Is there to be no cessation to the fiery pain of her heart; no moment of forgetfulness? The hours are creeping on, and merging into night. Ah, heaven! how shall she bear the night—the long, weary, wakeful hours of night? Alone, all alone, with this weight of intolerable anguish! Will it not end in madness? Is she not mad now?

She starts and trembles violently; then once more wanders up and down the room aimlessly.

“Mad! mad!” she repeats. “Can I be mad? Is this feeling I have, this painful throbbing of my head, madness?”

Suddenly, in a sort of revengeful frenzy, she pushes open the door of Richard Leslie’s dressing-room, and enters.

Surely she has intensified her anguish

and despair by coming here ; here where everything she sees reminds her of him. His brushes and combs on the table, with the newspaper all crumpled and torn as only that morning he had, in his anger at her taunts and abuse of Lucy, dashed it down. It was here, here on the very spot she stands, that he had struck her ; here that she had braved him, and sworn to have her revenge or die !

She moves on in fear, and nearly stumbles over the jug of hot water on the ground. How the steam, as it rises and twists now this way now that, bewilders her afresh. Why is Richard not here ? Why not ? And why has the jug been placed there, if not to madden her with the thought that it will be cold long before he comes ? Long before ! He will never come more ; and her heart echoes “ Never more ! never more ! ” And the thin wreath of steam seems to dance forth as though joyously mocking her anguish, and she stretches forth her foot, and with one blow dashes it over.

But the fierce, passionate action does not ease her heart ; for there is nothing—

nothing short of madness or death can ease it.

And this thought seems to strike her as she stands there, for she utters it over and over again.

“Madness or death? Madness or death?”

Is it even so? Is there no help?—no escape from this? No, none; it is still the same, ever the same—“Madness or death? Madness or death?”

Madness it shall not be! But death!—death! Why should it not be death?

She shudders. Not with cowardice, not with the dread of meeting it, seeking it face to face; but at the thought that life has so soon for her ceased to be. She is young, still young; her limbs full of supple strength and bodily health. Yet, ah! how old, how very old, how aged at heart to *live*!

Yet she will not live. She remembers her oath, how she had sworn to revenge herself or die, and die she will. Living she cannot revenge herself. Dying she can. So it shall be death. How, she knows not, she has not thought as yet.

Yet death it shall be. Death alone can ease her heart; death alone can hide her shame; death alone save her from the world's mark; death strike with remorse the heart of him whom now she thinks she hates.

And the boy—Lucy's boy! Would not the secret of his whereabouts die with her? Dead, they could not wrench it from her; the secret *would* die with her, and so she would be doubly revenged.

Yet even as she gloated over this, nature rose within her and would have its sway; and once more she gave herself up to the misery of her despair. Throwing her arms, in all the abandonment of grief, on to the top of an escritoire close to where she was standing, she let her head fall heavily upon them, and once more cried aloud.

Was there no hope—none? Must she never behold the light of another day? And her heart surged up once more, and whispered,—

“There is no hope. None. Hope is past and gone. Live, and each day is the counterpart of the one gone before—hope-

less, despairing, anguished, with the finger of contempt and scorn ever ready to be lifted. Die, and there is an end to despair, and anguish, and hopelessness.”

Surely Anna’s good angel had deserted her, or he would have mournfully whispered and warned her of an hereafter more hopeless, more despairing, more anguished, and from which there would be no escape.

But he was silent. She had battled as she rested there, but battled only with her fierce anger, her jealous shame; and with no thoughts save earthly ones, and those maddened and urged her on to her destruction.

When she lifted her head there was a glazed, glassy look in her eyes, almost akin to the madness she was dreading; a set, fixed, unalterable resolve in her clenched lips; and a stony look about her face, pale as one of the dead.

“I will die!”

She said it quietly, with no trembling of voice or limb, as she stretched forth her hand and drew a small polished box towards her. It was not locked. She

opened it, and drew out one of the small, yet for all that, deadly weapons within.

Here was death ; the death she sighed for. Death in her hand. Death at her call. Death when she willed it ; swift and sure, with no lingering of agony, no time even for thought, much less of repentance.

It was *he* who had taught her to use these weapons ; it was but meet and right that she should show him how well she had learned and remembered her lesson.

She moved across the room with the pistol firmly held in her hand, until she stood on the spot where Richard had struck her. Had she not sworn to die there ? Well, she would keep her oath. If he came back he would find her there. If he did not, others would tell him.

She is ready. Yet she hesitates. Is it because her soul shrinks from the heinous crime, and now, at the last moment, paralyses her hand, and whispers "Forbear ! Sin not against thy Maker ?" No ; alas ! no, it is not this ; for her resolve is fixed and unalterable. She will die ! She

has sworn it; and no will of hers, for she is incapable of exercising one, can save her; no promptings of her inmost soul, for its light is darkened by the madness of her agony.

She hesitates; but it is only to look down at the spot where she will fall, and to move the candles on the dressing-table—lit for him—further towards her, so that those who come to seek her shall find her quickly, and so swiftly bear the news abroad. So she hesitated—scarce a moment; yet that moment of hesitation has saved her, for as once more she stands steadily in her place, and lifting the pistol, places her finger firmly on the trigger, it is knocked upwards out of her hand.

There is a bright flash, a deafening report; then a cry, a loud convulsive cry from Anna.

Is she hurt? Is she wounded? Or is it a cry of despair at being foiled of her revenge, or of thankfulness at being saved from it?

Whichever it is she is saved!—she is unhurt! The tall, gaunt form of Anne

Campbell stands beside her, clutching hold of her fiercely.

"God forgive you! Oh, God forgive you!" she cries. "Down on your knees! Pray for mercy! Oh God! pray for mercy!"

CHAPTER XIII.

MEA CULPA.

Every sense
 Had been o'erstrung by pangs intense,
 And each frail fibre of her brain
 (As bow-strings when relaxed by rain
 The erring arrow launch aside)
 Sent forth her thoughts all wild and wide.

Lord Byron.

AND Lucy lay tossing deliriously in all the frenzy of brain fever, unconscious of all that was happening, or had happened, around her. Now it was Richard she piteously appealed to; now her boy she frantically struggled to save; and now she shrieked aloud with fear and dread of Anna.

Then sometimes she would mutter softly to herself, or act over and over again the dread, fearful scenes through which she had passed. But, unlike Anna, her murmurings were not of revenge, nor hatred,

nor anger against him who had injured her so deeply; but ever of pity and forgiveness, or pitiful pleading cries that she might not be led to judge him harshly.

How her words went to the hearts of those who tended her! Anne's eyes were often brimful of tears as she moved about her, or sat anxiously watching; while, as for her guilty wretched husband, his heart seemed wrung with anguish as he, too, sat by the bedside watching. He never left her; his spirit seemed never weary, nor his eyes heavy; yet the watch by Lucy's side was the heaviest punishment that could have been meted out to him. To hear her cries for help, yet be unable to help her! To hear her accord him the forgiveness, that it wrung him with anguish not to be able to ask! To hear her say she forgave him the sin, that if it was possible he would have washed away with tears of blood! She cried aloud for him; yet if he took her hand, she either suffered it to lie in his passively, with no consciousness as to who held it, or she dashed it away and screamed aloud in her fear of Anna. He was near her, yet she knew it

not. Would she ever know it? or would she pass away, and never give him a sign that she recognised him?

Richard suffered an agony of terror, grief, and remorse; at times it nearly drove him mad, and he would grovel on the ground, cursing himself for not having resisted temptation—cursing the sin he had so madly rushed into.

At such times as these Anne Campbell's words had little effect upon him; he was like a madman in his stinging self-reproach; he might cry "*meâ culpâ*," and beat his breast, and gnash his teeth until he was weary, but it brought no balm to his conscience, and could neither heal nor comfort Lucy. But when the frenzy was over, he would bow his head meekly at the stern words with which Anne Campbell reproached him for such useless, sinful exhibitions of grief, urging him to turn and seek—not to do away with his past sin, for that could never be wiped out—but to pray for help for Lucy, for mercy for Anna, and for forgiveness for himself, from Him who alone was able to give peace to any of them.

“ ‘As a man sows, so must he reap,’ ” she said; “your punishment is no greater than your sin, nor is it as great; neither is it greater than you are able to bear. It might have been greater than it is. Isn’t there another besides Lucy who is suffering? Haven’t you no thankfulness to God for having spared you the fearful thought that *her* death isn’t resting on your soul? Be still! Neither murmur nor waste your strength in useless cries or groanings; but repent in sackcloth and ashes of your wickedness, and be content to think that God has been very merciful to you—more merciful than you deserve.”

And Richard would groan afresh as he thought of Anna, and shudder, as he pictured her passionate temper, to think what even yet her revenge might be.

And what of Joe Simmonds—where was he? Had he been all this while unmindful and neglectful of Lucy; and this, too, when he had come up to London for the express purpose of befriending her? No! Although he had failed to follow and rescue her, as Richard had done, yet he had saved her boy, her cherished Dickey; for

on the day on which Anna, aided by Mrs. Brown, had so guiltily stolen the boy, Joe had, as usual, been keeping ward and watch without. With surprise he had seen Anna once more enter Lucy's lodging; with suspicion he had seen her come out hurriedly with the boy in her arms, and had followed in her wake, had bided his time, and then, by dint of stratagem aided by force, had obtained possession of the boy, and carried him off in triumph to his own lodging; then, armed with a sort of excuse for intruding upon Lucy, he with beating heart had sought her, but only to learn from Anne Campbell of the miserable plight she was in.

Miss Gathorne, in her anger, had said that Joe was the nearest approach to a villain she had ever seen; and certainly the old evil passions in his nature burnt afresh as he stood, as it were, dumb-founded and bewildered before Anne as she poured forth her story. If any man hated another justly, or could be allowed so to hate, then thus he hated Richard Leslie. Give him space—room—with no one to meddle between them, and

he felt as though, left to themselves, neither would be satisfied with less than the life-blood of the other; or be content until, like wild beasts, they had savagely torn one another, or fought to the very death; what though he had but one arm to do battle with?

This man had despoiled him of Lucy, her who was more to him than his life; who was to have been his wife; who would have been his wife but for him. With lies he had deceived them all—even Lucy; she, that tender flower whom he (Joe) would have shielded even from the too rough winds of heaven, had been neglected, betrayed, deserted, outraged in every possible way. This man, whom he hated, had torn her from all those who loved her; had sworn before God to love and cherish her; and had perjured himself like a double-dyed villain as he was, and had left her to fight her battle of life alone, and failing that to die.

“I will have his life’s blood,” he cried, hoarsely, as he stood before Anne Campbell, the blood coursing swiftly up to his very temples.

“Whose blood?” she answered; “Lucy’s? For in taking his you pour out hers. Lucy loves her husband,” said Anne, sternly and rebukingly.

Joe clenched his hand fiercely, to be balked of his revenge. Was it so? Did Lucy indeed love him yet? If she did, then God forbid that he should cause her more suffering by harming a single hair of his head: yet the while he thought it, the fiercer burnt the jealous just hate in his heart. Richard would live to sin perhaps afresh; to break some other loving, trusting heart; and Lucy would die, die in her youth, full of sorrows and wrongs enough to break the strongest heart. And when at times Joe thought of Lucy, so gentle, so loving, and so long-suffering, he would clasp little Dickey closely in his arm, almost as his mother had been wont to clasp him, and pray God to spare her, though it would be to make another’s happiness.

But for the child Joe would have been a prey to despair; but in his most desponding moods the boy would seem to guess at something wrong, and rouse him with

his childish prattle, drawing his thoughts away from himself. They were fast friends, these two; Dickey fed and clothed, as he could not remember having ever being fed and clothed, hardly fretted for mamma; for as he told Joe, in his little manly way, he was with the good man she had told him of, who was to take care of him until she fetched him away. And Joe was content to think that the child's words were truth, and that Lucy, in her forlorn state, had indeed had the wish of seeking him out, and confiding her one treasure to him. It brought him comfort: it brought him peace to think this; and often he would draw Dickey to him and say, "Let us talk of mamma," being sure that the one theme on the boy's tongue would be the one that consoled them both: Joe, in that Lucy had not forgotten him; Dickey, that mamma would not forget.

And so the days, the weary days for one and all, crept on, until, by-and-bye, came the hour in which Anne Campbell could fervently thank God for His mercy, when Lucy, pale as the driven snow, weak as an infant, awoke, as it were, to con-

sciousness and the reality of things around her, and Dickey was fetched to gladden his mother's eyes, though she had no strength to clasp him to her bosom. She asked no questions; neither then, nor when as the time wore on she could feebly thank Anne for the care, and lament the trouble she gave her. She seemed content to lie there with her boy's hands clasping hers, or listen to his little feet pattering now here, now there, across the floor. Had her mind failed as yet to remember the past: or did she remember and make no sign?

It was long, very long, ere Anne ventured to touch upon the past, or even, in a remote way, hint of things that had been. But the weeks had crept into a month, and the stray birds without sometimes ventured to twitter forth in that close street a mournful note, a kind of melancholy harbinger of spring. Lucy was able to bear well the fatigue of moving; and though Anne did not, strange to say, talk of a change of air for her, yet she spoke of a change of lodging, where Lucy—where they all would be better

cared for than in the wretched rooms they now occupied; and which, do as Anne would, always seemed to look so forlorn and desolate.

Installed in a comfortable lodging, with Lucy almost strong and well again, Anne determined upon keeping silence no longer; but with so many exciting events to narrate, it was difficult to know how much to tell, how much keep back; and over and over again Anne turned it in her mind, and over and over again thought of what she should say, and how say it, so as to least excite or pain Lucy.

They still had a fire, for the mornings and evenings were cold, and Lucy sat by its side one evening with Dickey asleep in her lap. She had been rocking him to and fro, and humming what sounded more like a dirge than a lullaby; but now she sat, with a sad, hopeless look on her face, gazing into the fire, for Anne had purposely avoided lighting the candles, and there was no light save that which flickered now and then from the fire across the two women's faces.

Where have Lucy's thoughts wandered?

and why are the tears dropping so silently one by one from her eyes? Anne sees them glistening every now and then as the fire flashes, and is not sorry she sees them, for surely now is her time for speaking ; now when the heart is softened and its strings cannot break by being too tightly strung. Lucy has forgotten that she is not alone, and has let her thoughts wander where they will, and knows not that the tears have gathered and are falling fast. She is in a world of her own, trying to conjure up visions that may be, yet weeping over past anguish or present misery. She sighs, sighs heavily as one so young ought not to sigh, for life at its commencement should surely be unclouded, however its ending may be darkened.

The two women for awhile sat silently, Anne wishing yet fearing to speak words which, however gently spoken, must touch and probe to the quick.

Yet she must speak. If not for herself, for Richard Leslie.

“ Lucy ! ”

It is Anne who calls, and Lucy starts and trembles, for the tone is one of solemn

warning, and fraught, as Lucy feels, with danger. But the ice broken, Anne no longer hesitates.

“Lucy, have you nothing to tell me about Mr. Leslie?”

The words are spoken, but they have a strange effect on Lucy. She trembles no longer, and in wonderment Anne sees her lift her boy in her arms and carry him away to bed.

Anne is left sitting by the fire alone, almost in a bewilderment. She has spoken with difficulty words that she feared would cause a world of sorrow, perhaps renewed anguish, and yet Lucy has heard them, listened to them with a feeling, as Anne seems to think, of reproach or displeasure; while instead of showing weakness she has given a sign of strength that Anne deemed her incapable of.

Would she return, or had she thus silently showed her displeasure at Anne's interference? Anne sat on and waited. Lucy would surely come back again, and when she did Anne must renew the contest between them, let it be productive of

what it would, for had not Richard Leslie urged her to it only a few hours before? "Tell her, and plead for me;" those had been his words, and Anne had readily promised to do the first, for she had felt it a duty for long, but as for the latter there was no need to plead for one whom Lucy loved all too well, and would, at the first knowledge of how and where he was, seek out of her own free will, and love and cherish even as her heart directed.

Anne's thoughts had not settled themselves when Lucy came back and at once went up to where Anne sat by the fire.

"Aunt," she said, "you have spoken words that I have dreaded, yet knew I must in the end hear from your lips; and I do not deny the right you have to speak them, and it is best I should tell you at once that I cannot answer them, neither now nor ever! You think me guilty and wicked, and I cannot prove to you that I am not; and you must not hate me nor judge me too harshly when I say that I am content to be thought so. You have been very good and kind to me, a great deal more so than I deserve, and you

would be good and kind to me still, only I will not let you, for, aunt, we must part. I am strong and well, able to work for myself and my boy, not here, not in England, where alas! there is so much misery, but away somewhere a long, long way off, where I can be neither a trouble nor a shame," and here Lucy's voice for the first time faltered, "to you or—or to any one."

"You mustn't leave England, Lucy," said Anne, with tenderness.

"I must. I cannot live—I cannot breathe in it. Aunt you will help me for the sake of the love and pity you had for my mother. It would break my heart to stay here. Oh Aunt Anne! Aunt Anne! there is danger, terrible, fearful danger to my boy, and—and everyone if I stay."

"Have you no birthright to give him?" said Anne, willing, if she could, to force Lucy into a confession.

"If I have," answered Lucy, firmly, "my child shall never betray his father."

"But what if his father betrays himself?" said Anne, rising and throwing her arms round Lucy. "There, child, don't

tremble so ; Richard Leslie acknowledged you as his wife more than a month ago, but I haven't dared tell you so till now. There, there ; I knew you weren't strong—nothing near so strong as you make out," for Lucy had slid from her on to the ground, and as Anne sat down rested her head on her lap sobbing passionately.

Anne left her so for awhile until she grew calmer, stroking and fondling, with a world of tenderness and pitiful sympathy, the poor, weary, bowed head. Then she tenderly whispered words of comfort, and rest, and peace, and even happiness, for her who had suffered so much misery and been tried to the very utmost.

"You are not deceiving me, aunt?" murmured Lucy at last.

"God forbid!"

And the head had bowed itself again, and the overcharged heart had once more allowed free vent to its wrung feelings. But Lucy did not speak, and Anne could not tell what result her communication had had on the stricken one.

By-and-bye, when both grew calmer, Lucy seated herself on a stool at Anne's

feet, and Anne, clasping her hand in hers; poured forth in a faltering voice, very different to her usual measured one, the story she had to tell, and long before she had done Lucy's head had drooped once more on to her lap, but she did not interrupt by a single word. Anne told all she knew, even to her having gone to see the miserable Anna; but she kept back the knowledge she had of the guilty attempt the latter had made on her life, for it would have only tortured Lucy to know it, and done no good—probably harm.

Lucy sat very quiet for awhile when Anne had finished. Then she said more to herself than Anne,—

“She would not see me if I went to her. She hates me. But have I not suffered as she is suffering? God help her, and *him*, and us all!”

And Anne had made reply, “Of her I know nothing, and cannot speak; but of him? Have you no word for him, Lucy?”

“Hush, aunt, hush! I must think.”

“You do not care to know where he is, or why he stays away from you?”

“It is right; it is best so.”

“If ever man repented in this world, child, he repents. His heart is wrung with anguish in that he cannot kneel at your feet and beg for forgiveness.”

“He must not come! Must not. Shall either he or I forget her? She has been most sinned against; shall I rejoice in her misery? Oh God! give me strength to resist it.”

“And yet he’s in trouble, Lucy. God forbid that I should say he doesn’t deserve it, or that his punishment is greater than he deserves; still to him it’s a terrible one.”

Lucy looked up quickly. “Where is he?” she said.

“Where he has time to torture himself by too much thought; where his wicked sin rises to upbraid him fifty times a day; where he has no soul but me to whisper comfort to him in any way, and where his thoughts at times well-nigh madden him. He is in jail, Lucy!”

Lucy started up on to her feet.

“Now God forbid!” she cried, clasping her hands wildly.

“It is true—too true,” replied Anne.

“Then God be merciful to *her*, when her time of remorse comes!” cried Lucy.

In another moment Anne sat alone, sorrowful, very sorrowful, keeping her weary heart-watch by the fire, and more than sorrowful, for Lucy had disappointed her.

Anne made no excuses for Richard’s sin, but seeing, knowing, how thoroughly repentant he was, her heart had somehow got a feeling of pity in it for him, although unacknowledged either to him or herself; and then she had had such a settled conviction that when once Lucy had been told the truth she would at once have taken her place, whether for good or ill, by his side; that she was almost angry at Lucy’s apparently inconsistent refusal to see him. Why had she been so agitated? and why so almost afraid that she might be induced to visit him? Had her anger, her wrongs, swept out the love of her heart? Would it be impossible that she and Richard could meet again?

“It’s a weary, weary world,” sighed Anne Campbell, as she sat on by the fire,

feeling more and more disappointed with Lucy.

That night Lucy sat up until the morning's dawn; and when the morning dawned she wrote to her husband a letter blotted and blistered with her tears.

CHAPTER XIV.

OUT IN THE NIGHT.

At first a glowing red enwraps the skies,
 And borne by winds the scattering sparks arise ;
 From beam to beam the fierce contagion spreads ;
 The fiery flames now lift aloft their heads ;
 Through the burst sa^h a blazing deluge pours,
 And splitting tiles descend in rattling showers.

Gay.

TWO months have passed away since my last chapter ; months of so little import that I shall pass them over, or make a short summary of them for the sake of my readers, whom I do not desire to weary by dwelling too minutely on small matters.

Yet it could be hardly called a small matter with Lucy that during all this while her husband was awaiting his trial in prison, having determinedly refused all offers of being bailed out.

Anne Campbell had carried Lucy's

letter to Richard, but had brought back no written answer.

"Tell her," he said, "that however hard her decision is, yet I will do as she says, and abide by it."

What this decision was Anne did not know; but she guessed it was one that caused the unhappy man an intensity of anguish, and she grew more dissatisfied and more disappointed with Lucy day by day.

"He is alone with those dreadful thoughts of his, Lucy," she said; "and suffering an agony in prison."

"God help him!" said Lucy; "I cannot."

Yet she suffered. Anne knew without a doubt that she suffered, for over and over again she detected the pale, listless face, the result of wakeful hours of night, or swollen eyes exhausted by days of bitter tears. Yet for all this she never spoke the words Anne longed to hear; never hinted even that ever in the future she would clasp her husband's hand in hers as a true wife should. Even her boy she kept closely by her side.

“Shall I take him with me?” said Anne, as cloaked and with bonnet on she was going, as Lucy knew full well, to see the child’s father. “Surely, Lucy, it would be well?”

“It would not be well,” answered Lucy. “The child’s first recollection of his father shall not be—there.”

And Anne had gone forth alone once more, and for the last time; for she would not be allowed to see Richard again until he had stood arraigned before his fellow-men, and with Anna Elton as his stern accuser, had received the sentence, perhaps only half the adequate punishment for his sin.

Eighteen months’ imprisonment! Such was Richard’s sentence. Such was all the laws of England allow for, if not breaking the hearts of two women, at least inflicting a life-long misery on both.

The sentence passed, with aching heart Anne hurried home to Lucy.

Surely now the ice about the heart would melt. Surely now her wifely feeling would rise all paramount; and with all her wrongs wiped out through his

utter self-abasement and misery, she would think no more of her shame and her reproach, but go to him, and for a brief while at least be his one beacon of comfort, his one stay, and his one hope that when his term of imprisonment should be over, he, as a humbly repentant man, would find her willing to walk by his side in this life so long as he lived.

But Lucy gave Anne no such hope.

She wept when told the news, wept as she had not wept since the evening on which Anne had told her that Richard had acknowledged her as his wife; but she made no sign that Anne could construe into a hope that her heart had softened towards him now, even at the eleventh hour; and Anne's patience was fairly exhausted, and she angered with what she chose to think such wilful, fatal obstinacy. She would not spare her; no, she would not spare her.

"Your *husband*, Lucy," said she, laying an unnecessary stress on the word, "looks ill, wretchedly ill."

But Lucy had only bent her head the lower, and wept the more.

“Tears won’t help him,” continued she. “Lucy, I can’t believe you’re going to be so hard-hearted as not to go anearst him?”

“It is not hardness of heart, aunt. Surely *he* cannot think so?”

“I don’t know what he thinks, and ’tis a wonder if he don’t think so. It breaks my heart to see him; and ’tis your duty, Lucy, to go and see him. You will be sorry if you don’t. Ain’t we told to forgive one another though we’re sinned against seventy times seven? I can’t think what kind of a heart you must have, nor how you can ever pray to God to forgive you your trespasses even as you forgive them that trespass against you. Your husband is so fast in prison that he cannot get forth. His sight faileth for very trouble. He is in misery, and like unto him that is at the point to die. Is this a time for his wife to keep aloof from him? No, I say it is not a time, and that you do wrongly, wickedly, in keeping away from him,” said Anne, with such warmth as she had not shown for years.

But Lucy did as she always did now when her aunt attempted to reason with her, she went away up to her room; but with such a look of suffering that half Anne's anger melted away, and she was almost persuaded to think that she had been too harsh with her.

For the rest of the day Lucy kept to her room; while Anne, left to herself, was restlessly unhappy, and could settle to nothing. If she worked she knotted her cotton or broke her needle. If she read she could not concentrate her thoughts on to her book, but would wake, as it were, by-and-bye to find the book in her lap, and she conjuring up visions of what seemed impossible now she had come out of dreamland. But perhaps when Lucy came to say good-night it might be with a softened heart, or at least some sign that there was a possibility of her relenting from the fixed purpose which seemed to have taken possession of her soul.

Yet when Anne went to bed that night she knew beyond a doubt that Lucy had not relented, neither had she given one single sign that it was possible she should relent.

And what should Anne say to Richard Leslie? How meet the look in his eyes, the expectant look which she was sure to see there?

Tormented with thoughts she could not control, harassed by doubts she could in no wise reconcile with the knowledge she had of Lucy's pliant, gentle disposition, it was long before Anne's eyes closed in sleep, and then she did not sleep soundly. Though her body rested her spirit was awake, and her mind reviewing past and present things, for once again she was in Court, trembling as she saw the multitude of anxious upturned faces awaiting the arrival of the prisoner, and heard the loud murmur of disapprobation with which he was greeted. But this time, as if to make her misery more complete, he, instead of as at his trial pleading "Guilty," cried in a loud voice "Not Guilty," and oh, horror! she, Anne Campbell, and not Anna Elton, stepped forth as his accuser to denounce him. But even as she stepped forth a light hand was laid on her shoulder, and she shivered as she slept, as turning she saw Lucy! Lucy, who strove

to detain her, but a mightier will than hers seemed to urge her on, and she screamed aloud in her frantic efforts to resist it, and awoke.

Was she still dreaming, or did Lucy indeed stand by her side? Was it indeed her pale, sad face bending down over her?

“Lucy?”

“Yes, aunt. There is a dreadful fire somewhere,” and Anne, now fully roused to consciousness, saw that the candle she carried was shaking in her unsteady hand.

“I have heard it said there is a fire every night in London,” answered Anne. “God send that no one may come to harm!”

“Hark!” cried Lucy; “hark to the voices and the many feet trampling without!” and she set down the candle, and sitting down on a chair by Anne’s bedside, shivered from head to foot.

“Your nerves are unstrung, child,” said Anne. “Don’t sit out there in the cold. Have you left the child all alone?”

“No, no; nurse is with him; and oh, aunt! I am so frightened! I have heard

the tramping going on for half an hour and more, and I cannot—cannot bear it any longer.”

“There is nothing to be frightened at,” said Anne. “I dare say the fire is miles away from this.”

“But where?—where? Oh, aunt! where?” said Lucy, anxiously.

Anne’s face became as pale as death, and she turned it away from Lucy.

“Your nerves are unstrung, child, as I said before. This fire,” and she spoke slowly, “can in no wise concern either you or me.”

Lucy sat silent, but shivering exceedingly; and Anne got out of bed, and throwing on her dressing-gown, sat down by her. But somehow, instead of speaking words of comfort, she sat by Lucy’s side, with a face paler than hers, and breath that seemed to stop with every fresh sound of the tramp, tramp without.

“Aunt, I shall go,” said Lucy, presently; “it makes me sick to sit here.”

“Go! where?”

“To the fire,” said Lucy, decidedly.

"Impossible!" cried Anne, catching her hand.

"I shall go," said Lucy again, "with you, if you will, if not, without you."

And without staying to hear Anne's remonstrances she left the room, and groped her way upstairs again; and Anne could hear that she was moving about as though preparing to carry her resolve into execution. There was no time for deliberation, no time for troubled speculation, no time for useless murmurings; and Anne, trembling and ill at ease, set about dressing herself quickly.

When Lucy came down Anne was waiting for her.

"This is a mad freak of yours, Lucy," she said, "and one that I don't countenance in any way. We can't neither of us do no good."

But Lucy paid no heed; she unbolted the front door and they stood without, the cold night air blowing across their faces. In another moment the nurse, who had come downstairs with them, had closed the door and rebolted it, and the two women were free to go where they would.

But the crowd, whose many footsteps they had heard, had gone by, and only a few stragglers were left to show them which direction to take. Lucy went swiftly after them, and Anne followed her closely, her mind apparently in a more confused state than Lucy's, for she stumbled or knocked against those going less swiftly, until Lucy was fain to give her an arm. They seemed to have changed places. Lucy so firm and steady, yet anxiously hastening her steps, and supporting Anne, who trembled exceedingly.

Silently they hurried on for upwards of half a mile, when suddenly at the turning of a street, a red lurid glare lit up the heavens to the right. Anne hung heavily on Lucy's arm, while every now and then her lips seemed moving as though in prayer; and they were moving in prayer, for, agitated as she was, she recognised but too well the locality they were in now; every street seemed to choke her with its memories, while here and there the balcony of a house, or it might be a shrub in an old worn tub, or the peculiar formation of some solemn, unwieldy-looking porch

scared her, and sent her memory back to that never-to-be-forgotten night when she had gone with oppressed and sorrowful heart to seek Anna Elton.

She dragged heavily upon Lucy now; dragged more heavily still as they passed down the street, and she heard the hum of men's voices, the surging and swaying to and fro of a mighty multitude, as the red-hot sparks fell here and there amongst them. Still Lucy guided her on; and now the crackling and blazing of the fire smites her ears, and she sees, as it were, large flakes of fire falling before her. Yet Lucy keeps on, and more and more Anne's thoughts are centred on Anna Elton. This is the street, the very street that had been almost blocked with carriages, and this the house from which she had heard the sounds of music and laughter, and the windows of which had been ablaze with lights. And that—that is the corner round which she had turned to Anna's; there she hears the roar of voices, there where the sparks are flying, and the crackling of blazing timbers, though she cannot see as yet the house that is burning; and

there it is that Lucy is hurrying. But her spirit grows faint—horrified with the remembrance of the past, trembling and uncertain as to the future.

“Not there. Oh, for God’s sake, not there, Lucy!” she cries.

Lucy heeds her not, but drags her on.

Oh, what a fearful sight! Her eyes are blinded by the dazzling light; her ears deafened by the shouts; and her senses scared and well-nigh leaving her, as in vain she tries to think that it is not Anna Elton’s house that she sees all covered with flame.

Upward soar the flames of the doomed house—it may be houses, for the fire is mighty, and notwithstanding the jets of water brought to bear on it is bursting out afresh, now here, now there, licking up everything in its way. The windows are dark in comparison with the bright red light around, yet in the midst of flame and smoke, oh horror! a woman’s form stands out in bold relief at one of the windows. She is not crying for help, neither does she gesticulate wildly; but she stands there amidst the burning mass

with no movement of either terror or despair—the only one unmoved amongst that vast assemblage of human beings, where some hearts might surely be found stained with crime, or hardened to harrowing sights; yet, now one and all moved to make one great effort to save her, it might be even to dare death in their frenzied excitement for her.

“Save her! save her!” burst as it were with one voice from the lips of the vast multitude.

The bold, brave, fearless firemen answered to the cry; and in another moment once more (for it had been used before that night on the self-same house) a fire-escape is attempted to be placed against the house. But the eagerness, the excitement of the crowd was great, and defeated the object they had in view. Too much haste was used; some of the rope gear gave way and it fell to the ground.

A groan loud and prolonged burst from the crowd, a thousand voices cried, “Jump out!” yet the figure stood motionless, still the only one unmoved amongst that vast sea of human faces.

Was it a living, breathing woman they saw; a creature of flesh and blood who could thus stand so calmly, or have every nerve so paralysed, when the flames are leaping and dancing around her?

And the question is answered by a wild shriek which echoes through every heart, hardened or otherwise, there present.

It is a woman's cry of agony that rings out so loudly, and with such despairing anguish; and it is heard above the fierce roar of the fire; it mingles with the hushed horror of the crowd.

"Save her! Save her! Oh my God! save her!"

It is Lucy who so cries! It is Lucy who struggles and fights to force her way through the crowd to *her* who, even in the anguished horror of the scene, amidst all the flare and flame and smoke, she recognises as Anna Elton!—she whom of all women in the world, she, if any one, has reason to hate; yet she feels as she shrieks aloud in her fear and dismayed terror, and beats frantically with her hands to force a passage through the myriads of human beings who hem her in,

that she will willingly die if needs be to save her.

But she shrieks in vain ; she implores in vain ; for scarcely has the cry for help left her lips before the roof of the burning house falls through ; the flames leap higher and higher ; and with a smothered cry of horror from the crowd, the fire burns more savagely, as though rejoicing over the one human being who has been, without an effort to save herself, sacrificed to its fury.

* * * *

How Anne reached home that night she scarcely knew. She had a dim recollection of seeing Lucy well-nigh trampled under the feet of the crowd, and of her own frantic, useless efforts to reach her, and of their both being dragged forth, and of finding herself driven rapidly homewards.

Oh what a morning of misery it is ! How the light of the sun makes Anne shudder as she sits gloomily, and with horror-struck senses by Lucy's bedside, and the latter moans now and then as though with unspeakable anguish, and Anne has no words wherewith to comfort

or solace ; neither can she force her lips to utter one text from her favourite psalmist, though she recalls dozens to her heart. She is all too appalled with the remembrance of the awful scene she has witnessed, and which she seems to think will live in her heart night and day for ever !

But the day passes on, and Anne becomes calmer, and Lucy rouses herself, and goes about the house like one risen from the dead, in whom life is coming back slowly, for the heart is not intended to keep a lively sense of its misery for ever. Its natural warmth returns to it after awhile, and melts—even as fire does wax—the one ever so deeply indented impression ; and though the vision or image may still haunt the heart, yet it can never be stamped upon it again with the self-same visible reality.

“ What’s past, and what’s to come, is strew’d with hushs,
The formless ruin of Oblivion.”

That evening, when Lucy bid Anne good-night, she left her hand in hers and said, softly,—

“ Aunt, I will go and see Richard now.”

And as Anne, somewhat startled, looked up into her face, she read suddenly there what had been concealed from her so long ; read the meaning of what she had wrongly conceived to be a feeling of anger, or obstinacy, or loss of love for Richard.

Yes, Lucy would go now ; now that there was no one in the world to stand between him and her ; now that she could not add one pang to the misery suffered by another ; now that the sinned against had passed away, and that no earthly atonement could avail her ; for, as she had written in her touching letter to her husband, it was not right that their happiness should be flaunted in the eyes or knowledge of her who had been most greatly sinned against. So she would not see her husband, lest her courage might fail her, or her heart give way. So she would not tell Anne, nor explain her conduct to her, lest she might be persuaded against her resolve.

And so Anne came to learn the truth at last.

CHAPTER XV.

BACK AT EASTHAM.

There's music in each wind that blows
Within our native valley breathing ;
There's beauty in each flower that grows
Around our native woodland wreathing.

Gerald Griffin.

AND soon Lucy was once more clasped to her husband's repentant heart, and had sorrowfully, for how could it be otherwise, spoken words of peace and consolation to him, at least such words as she dared speak. She neither reproached nor blamed him, and she was wise ; for had she pressed too strongly upon the remorse he felt, she might have made a fierce scoffer of him of all things just and true ; for an unguarded word or hint from her that he had lost the place he once held in her heart, and he would

have become reckless as to the future. But Lucy saw that he felt his sinful life bitterly, and repented it heartily, and she tried by her gentle ministrations to make it a lasting repentance when the sharpness of present events should have passed away.

He listened to her humbly, and strove to imagine the peace she promised him; but Anna's fearful death was ever haunting him with terrible distinctness. Time might heal the wound and anguish, but it could never, so he felt, bring peace; he must always suffer from an awful remorse and sinking despair, which, though blunted of their keen edges, would yet dog his soul for ever.

They parted. She hopeful as to the future, yet mournfully conscious of the past; he repentant, yet despairing.

Anne Campbell and Lucy went back to Eastham. Lucy would fain have remained where she was, but it was Richard's wish that she should accept Miss Gathorne's pressing invitation, and by living under his aunt's roof and protection show the world that no slur, nor

even doubt, could be cast on his wife's honour.

So Lucy went. And at Eastham, for the first time since they had parted, she met Joe Simmonds.

It was a meeting fraught with pain to both, and one which Joe himself had avoided by leaving London as soon as he had handed Dickey over to Anne Campbell's keeping; but Lucy had come to Eastham before he had been aware of her purpose, and Anne had sternly and pitilessly insisted upon his going to see her.

"She's at peace with all men," she said. "She feels her position acutely, and I know blames herself for much that has happened. Shall you keep aloof, and by so doing let her think that you've neither forgotten nor forgiven the wrong she did you? Go and see her, and—and please God it will be a cure for you."

Joe did not believe the latter, for he felt his heart beat painfully at the bare thought of seeing Lucy and touching her hand again, yet Anne had made it a question of honour with him to go. And he went.

So they met, and though the past was exquisitely painful to Lucy to touch upon, yet she did touch upon it to thank him for his care of her boy; little Dickey, to stop embarrassing questions and answers, being allowed to see and once more climb the knee of the good man who had taken such care of him when mamma was ill.

“The boy is dreadfully spoilt,” said Miss Gathorne, who had wisely been invited to be present. “No one knows what a nuisance he is but me. If I had anything to do with him I’d buy him a birch rod. Do you know what a sound good whipping means, Dickey?”

“How should he, Aunt Gathorne?” answered Lucy; “he is but two years old.”

“Twenty-three months too old not to know what a whipping means!”

Lucy caught up little Dickey, who seemed frightened, scarcely knowing why, and sent him away to his nursery. “The proper place for him,” as Miss Gathorne remarked, although in her heart of hearts she loved him dearly.

“And so,” said Miss Gathorne, as

soon as Dickey was gone; "and so, Captain Simmonds, I hear your old father is doing all he can to make a goose of himself. Billing and cooing like any young cupid! 'There are no fools like old fools.' That saying came across my mind when I first learnt all about his tomfoolery."

"My father knows very well what he's about," answered Joe, laughing.

"And I say he doesn't, and that he ought to be in a lunatic asylum. A man of his years! Why hadn't he thought of it before?"

"He did think of it before," said Joe.

"And aunt must be very lonely," said Lucy.

"Lonely! Well there may be something in that," said Miss Gathorne, who had her own reasons for not administering any balm to Anne's loneliness; "but why on earth cannot the farmer befool a younger woman—there are lots of 'em about—instead of being so obstinately set upon such a disagreeable, middle-aged one as Anne Campbell. It's of no use looking at me in that way, Lucy; I have

always thought Anne disagreeable, and always shall."

"I would rather," said Joe, "have her for my mother than any woman I know. My father is not so very old—fifty-six."

"He might be a hundred," returned Miss Gathorne, "to judge by his folly. Well, I hope they won't have the bells rung, nor any bride-cake, nor bridesmaids, nor favours, nor any humbug of that sort. Well, well! Anne Campbell of all women in the world! Who'd have thought it? I shall be the next to be turned off, or old Bridget, I suppose. Tell your father, with my compliments, that I hope his marriage will be a happy one, and that, if he wishes it to be thought a wise one, he will take his newly-acquired hearth-comfort away from Eastham before the butchers' or bakers' boys get scent of it."

But Miss Gathorne had not all the laugh on her side, for not many days after this old Sir Crosby fulfilled the very prediction she had so sarcastically hinted at as an impossible absurdity to Joe.

The poor old man had been living a

dismal sort of life at Leighlands, almost frightened with the loneliness and saddened aspect of everything around him, and, since his hapless daughter's death, had become in mind more childish than ever. He could not be made to see why he should avoid Lucy, or cease to have a chat now and then with his old friend Miss Gathorne; and indeed in his solitariness both became a necessity that he could not do without, and so his visits to "The House" were soon more frequent than ever, and at length an almost every day occurrence. It was Lucy who somehow soothed his sadness, or helped in a measure to dissipate the unquiet restlessness of his mind; and although his mention and recollection of the past was inexpressibly painful to her, yet she set herself resolutely to the task of fulfilling the part that Anna would have taken, had death not robbed the poor old man of what he was wont to speak of as his one last earthly blessing.

Yet he never seemed to speak purposely of Anna; but every now and again something that she had either said or done came across him, and he would recount it

very pitifully and with many sighs to Lucy; and then by-and-bye apologize very humbly for his want of prudence or forethought. So often these little slips occurred that soon Lucy could listen calmly, without the sudden paling of her naturally pale face and quickly coming breath.

He never spoke of the fire but once, and that was when Lucy had been very tender and compassionate with him; and then he told her that poor Anna must have had a presentiment of coming evil; for when on leaving the court on the day that would be for ever impressed on either's memory, she had kissed him twice running, of her own accord—a thing she had never done in her life—before she put him in the train that was to bear him away from her to Eastham, never to meet him again in this world.

“She *would* make me go; she *would* make go,” he repeated, in a kind of sorrowful refrain when he had told his story.

And Lucy had consoled and comforted him as well as she could. But only

Richard Leslie and Anne Campbell held a secret which bid defiance to at least the first ever knowing peace, for he dared not share with any one the possibility that Anna's death might have been one of self-destruction; but Anne's secret feeling about it lost half its fearful weight when she could and did share it with her husband. The farmer pooh-poohed it at first; but when he saw how gravely it sorrowed his wife he consented to allow himself to believe—as he had done all along when he had listened to Anne's story—that there might be grave reasons for such fear.

But I am leaving Sir Crosby too long waiting in the porch of "The House."

The weather—the end of June—was excessively sultry, and Miss Gathorne felt the heat greatly, and in fact had been quite ill from it; added to which she had been suffering from pains in the joints, which Bridget persisted obstinately in describing as rheumatism. The two had many a fight about it, neither giving in or being any the better convinced in the end; but Miss Gathorne had the best

of the fight, for she strenuously refused to be treated for rheumatism, and doctored herself, to Bridget's horror; wasting sheets of what is called "Poor Man's Plaister," and being, as Bridget triumphantly said, "None the better for it, but rather the worse in the end."

Miss Gathorne had a small sitting-room upstairs, where, with Lucy, she generally spent the morning. Here, ready-dressed, she comfortably settled herself, gave her orders for dinner, or read or worked as it suited her, and here on this eventful morning Sir Crosby found her.

She had been out gardening, and, dreadfully overcome with the heat and the old pain, had forgotten to take off her large brown mushroom-shaped straw hat; and Lucy could not forbear smiling at Sir Crosby's consternation when he caught sight of her. He came in, stick in hand—for he had grown somewhat feeble lately—and, like a true gentleman of the old school, carrying his hat in his hand.

"Now sit down," she said; "pray sit down, Sir Crosby. There, that's right; now, if you feel comfortable, so do I."

“I am not comfortable, my dear lady ; I cannot bear to see you. This place does not agree with you. You are out of sorts and out of order.”

“No such a thing,” returned she, angrily ; “I can sort myself perfectly well ; and, as to order, why let everybody betake themselves to their own business and not interfere with mine, lest it should be the worse for them.”

“Yes, yes, I know you are a thorough woman of business. Dear me ! I wish I had only half your head, ma’am ; only half of it,” sighed the baronet.

“You’d find it a mighty deal too heavy for your shoulders, I can tell you ; and if you could have your wish, you had better suggest it should fit on hind side before, so that it should not be always snapping and snarling at you. Come, Sir Crosby, let us talk common sense, for goodness’ sake. Lucy, do open that window a little higher, if you can ; I never felt so hot in my life.”

“There is very little air abroad,” said Lucy ; “I think the trees on this side keep away the breeze.”

“Just so,” remarked Sir Crosby; “that’s just what I wished to say. Now, look at my place; look at Leighlands, situate on the top of a hill. Can you find a more healthy spot anywhere, or one more bracing and congenial to the nervous system? Lady E—, a clever, very clever woman, always used to say I should have been a dead man but for the Park; but that it served to keep both body and soul together.”

“I have no doubt that she meant that in the truest sense of the word,” Miss Gathorne said, drily; “but all the same it did not keep her body from perishing. We never did agree on any one single subject—never! and the less I hear about her sayings and doings the better. Of course, I don’t deny that you are right to think well of your dead wife, and all I’ve got to say is that the feeling does you credit.”

“She managed everything for me. Dear, dear! what a head she had for business.”

“And what a heart!” growled Miss Gathorne.

“Nothing was a difficulty with her. She caught at and grasped everything.”

“That I can well imagine.”

“And turned everything to account—everything.”

“That too I can well imagine.”

“And I’m nothing and nobody without her.”

“I won’t dispute it.”

“And the responsibility and accumulation and worry of business is more than I, my dear lady, can manage.”

“I shall not be so rude as to contradict you.”

“And I have said to myself over and over again, ‘What is to be done? What is to be done?’ And suddenly, yes, suddenly, my mind has suggested a remedy.”

“I can scarcely believe it.”

“A simple, very simple remedy.”

“That is understood without a doubt.”

“And I have hastened over this morning to suggest—propose it, if you will allow me; and I wish I could say without fear as to its result.”

“It’s so seldom you propose anything, Sir Crosby, that I should say your fears

must be groundless," said Miss Gathorne, in the same caustic way.

"Now, my dear lady, you embolden me to proceed—I did feel nervous. I must confess a little nervous as—as to how you would take it; but really, now, by the Lord! I don't feel half as timid as I did when I made up my mind to propose to Lady Elton!" said Sir Crosby, bringing his stick so violently down upon the ground that both Miss Gathorne and Lucy looked at him in wonder.

"That's the nearest approach to an oath that I ever heard from your lips, Sir Crosby," said Miss Gathorne; "and I hope you won't give way to any more of these dramatic efforts; you are too old, a great deal too old, for any such bombastic vagaries. Why don't you come to the point—the pith of your story?"

"But everything must have a beginning, 'aunt,'" said Lucy.

"The beginning is so long that there won't, as far as I see, be any time left for the end," replied Miss Gathorne.

"If I was certain of the end," said Sir Crosby, "I would not dwell so long on

the beginning, but I must pave the way ; and—and excuse me, ma'am, but there are really so many interruptions, I lose the pith of my story. What I wish to propose is, that seeing singly, singly I am unable to cope with my—the press of business, not to say money matters, that accumulate about me, that—that suppose you—always including Lucy and her boy, and—and, in fact, any one you like, come and stay with me at the Park,” said Sir Crosby, shuffling about as though the nervousness he had disclaimed was returning to him in full force.

“And prancing about the Park as overseer! or make myself hoarse giving orders—which are sure to knock all yours on the head—as head-steward! No thank you, Sir Crosby.”

“I think the change would do you good, aunt,” said Lucy, “for a time.”

“Now my dear young lady, I thank you with all my heart. But why for a time? Why not always?”

“*Always*, Sir Crosby,” exclaimed Miss Gathorne; “grief has deranged your mind, I think. Why I’ve lived here for twenty

years, and my grandfather and great-grandfather before me, and God knows how many fathers besides."

"My ancestors have lived in Leighlands I don't know how many hundred years ago," said Sir Crosby, in a kind of apologetic tone.

"And," said Miss Gathorne, "a nice musty place it must be by this time."

"Well, madam, well, I would give it up, I would, indeed, if you desired it. I have other houses."

"What do I care for other houses? I've got a good sound roof over my head, and can't see what in the world you are driving at."

"I thought I had said. I really thought I had said that I wished you would come and live at Leighlands; and I am sure Lucy echoed my wish."

"And I thought I said I would not do anything of the kind. Really, Sir Crosby, I am surprised that you can propose such a thing. It really would not be proper," and Miss Gathorne held up her head and tried to look scandalized.

"Not proper! Not as mistress? Not

as my Lady Elton?" said the baronet, with really a lofty air and manner.

"Lady Elton!" almost screamed Miss Gathorne, her mushroom hat shaking with indignation.

"Of course, of course. The very idea makes me feel young again," said Sir Crosby, jauntily.

"Young! I should think so. Swaddling clothes instead of a tight waistcoat. Fie! Sir Crosby, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, trying to bamboozle an old woman like me! Now look here, to set the matter at rest for ever, and to show you how near you have been signing your own death-warrant, let me tell you that I have no notion of playing dog to a blind man; and if ever at your peril you persuade me—at your peril mind—to become my Lady Elton, I'll lead you the life of the very dog you want to turn me into. I look upon this visit, sir, and proposal, sir, as an insult—a downright insult, and one that I feel more than half inclined to chastise unmercifully. Look at that whip, sir," and she pointed to one hanging overhead, with spurs and bridle to boot, for

this room had been her brother's, Lucy's father's; "look at that whip, Sir Crosby, and take your leave before it's unhitched off its nail. Pshaw! I haven't patience with you!"

"Dear, dear!" said Sir Crosby, as Lucy went down the stairs with him, "she has a head for business; I wasn't wrong there. But what a temper! I had no idea it was so bad. I've had an escape, my dear, a most lucky escape. Poor Lady Elton! poor dear soul! There, there; come and see me soon, my dear; and—and take care of yourself," said he, mysteriously, and stepping at the same time on to the gravel walk. But he suddenly changed his mind and returned, looking still more mysterious.

"I've never heard it said that—that," said he, stammering, "there *was* madness in the family, the Gathorne family; but Lady Elton used to say *she*," and he pointed with his stick in the direction of the west window, "was—was—well—strange; and, my dear, she *is* strange, and my lady was a clever—a very clever woman, and—and it was a sad loss—a

very sad loss indeed when *she*," and here he further illustrated his speech by pointing to the churchyard, "was taken from me. I put her up a gravestone—a very handsome gravestone; but it isn't half as handsome as she deserves, and—and I think I'll put her up another."

And so, completely crestfallen, he muttered and mumbled to himself as he went down the garden walk.

Lucy returned upstairs and found Miss Gathorne still in the same position.

"Give me your hand, Lucy," she said, and she held out hers with the air of an empress whose dignity has been gravely offended.

"Yes, aunt."

"And don't call me aunt any longer. Call me grandma, for there's no doubt that I'm in my second childhood, or Sir Crosby would never have ventured to think me an idiot!"

But grandma had more troubles than this to battle with; for a few weeks after this memorable day the circus revisited Eastham on its return tour. And once again the Babylonish chariot drove

through the village, even venturing to make a stand outside the left gate of "The House," so as to be under the shade of the tall tope of trees there, and playing its most ungodly tunes for more than a quarter of an hour; and although Teazle was let loose, he would have nothing to do in the matter of frightening the strangers; and as Miss Gathorne did not choose to appeal for redress to Sir Crosby, the band returned to their old shady quarters for three days consecutively; the villagers all agape with excitement and wonder, and clustering like bees round the gate of "The House."

And each day Betsy Ernslie's scarlet petticoat might be distinguished now here, now there, amongst the crowd, a brighter colour on her cheeks, and a darker light in her eyes, and she consequently looking handsomer than ever, as no one knew better than herself.

Lucy observed her one morning particularly, as she held little Dickey up at the window to see the band, and was struck with the peculiarly dogged, hopeless look that sometimes not only flitted,

but actually settled on her face when she seemed, as it were, to be listening without hearing, or looking on the scene before her with no knowledge of what it might be all about.

It looked so strange for a young married woman in her station of life, the wife of the well-to-do blacksmith, to be loitering near, if not amongst, such a rabble, that Lucy's thoughts often reverted to her during that day; and on the next she had fully determined, in her own mind, to go down to the gate and speak with Betsy.

But the next day no music disturbed the sanctity of "The House," and neither rabble nor Betsy Ernslye haunted its gates, for the circus had gone; and later there was a hue and cry all over Eastham that Betsy Ernslye had gone too!

And by the next day's early post Miss Gathorne received a letter, which she had some difficulty in deciphering, and which I here transcribe, word for word, having corrected the spelling, though not the grammar, lest it should puzzle my readers as it did Miss Gathorne.

‘DEAR MA’AM,—

This comes hoping you are bothered in health, as it leaves me at present. I’m sorry I can’t never wish you no better wish; but seeing that it’s along of you that my troubles have come, I ain’t a-going to be no hypocrite, nor make no bones about it. It’s on the cards, as they says at the circus, that you won’t never go for to believe such a good-for-nothing slut as you says I be; so I’ll just make so bold as to ask you to shut up—another circus word. Oh! I’m a-getting a apt scholar, I be; and you see, ma’am, I’m a-increasing o’ my larning sharp, and ’ll be able to writ’ it all down plain for you. Fust o’ all, wasn’t it you as comed in amongst the graves, and stopped Joe a-asking o’ me to be his wife? (Oh! what a different girl it ’ould ha’ made o’ me.) An’ didn’t you jeer an’ go on ’bout Joe times out o’ number; an’ didn’t you say I was a oudacious hussy, an’ a bad, shameless wench, to be allowing o’ Jacob to dance his heels after me, wi’out in my bad heart a thought o’ settling down an’ marrying him; an’ didn’t I take your advice, an’ get married

to him; an' haven't I come to know that 'twas the very worst piece o' luck as ever happened to me an' Jacob, for don't I know I don't love him, nor nothing, an' I can't bide wi' him, I be that restless an' onsettled? Oh! I wish I was dead; an' I wish I could undo what I done; for don't I know 'tis a sorrow to Jacob to have sich a wife as me as can't settle myself to nothing. So, ma'am, I ain't going to bide no longer wi' him. It'll 'most break his heart at the fust, but I'd break it more an' more if I bided, an' I won't bide; I'll go an' ha' my fling at the circus. There now! I know I'll ha' a jolly time o' it, an' I know I'll ha' a deal to larn afore I can ride o' the bare backs o' horses; but I'll ha' to ha' my wits about me, an' not allays be a-mooning about the lanes, an' a-thinking o' what makes me wicked. So I write this, ma'am, for you to please to tell Jacob what I ha' done, an' what a wicked, deceitful wench I be; an' I know you'll persuade him to it, 'cause why, you ar'n't got no love for me. An' now, ma'am, wi' my dutiful re-

spects, I beg to say I ain't got no shame to say I'm a out-an'-out

CIRCUS WENCH.

“P.S.—’Tis Betsy as writes, an’ ’tain’t a wild beast show this; an’ you won’t never ha’ the pleasure o’ reading in the papers that that there good-for-nothing slut, Betsy, ha’ got her reward for all her sins, by being a-devoured o’ wild beastes.”

“There!” said Betsy to herself when she had with difficulty penned this; “that’ll settle old ‘Spitfire,’ and most double-shuffle her, as old Samby says.” (Old Samby was the circus dancing or limb master.) “Yes, that’ll settle her!”

And it certainly did settle Miss Gathorne for a very long while.

CHAPTER XVI.

MORE THAN A YEAR AFTER.

For, this ye know well, tho' I wouldin lie,
 In women is all truth and steadfastness ;
 For, in good faith, I never of them sie
 But much beauty, bounty, and gentleness,
 Right coming, fair, and full of meekéness ;
 Good, and glad, and lowly, I you ensure,
 Is this goodly and àngelic creatùre.

And if it hap a man be in disease,
 She doth her busíness and her full pain
 With all her might him to comfòrt and please,
 If fro his disease him she might restrain :
 In word ne deed, I wis, she will not faine ;
 With all her might she doth her busíness
 To bringen him out of his heaviness.

THE sun shone with resplendent
 brightness. The whole heavens
 seemed one sheet of softest blue, without
 the faintest cloud to mar their surface.
 The sea was like one large silver mirror ;
 still and almost silent, but for the gentle
 rippling backwards and forwards of the

tide, as in tiny waves it broke smoothly over the pebbly beach.

It is a seaport town, and the lading and unlading of ships going or coming from distant ports noisily breaks the silence that otherwise would have reigned on this morning of one of the brightest of bright summer days—a morning on which men's hearts unconsciously gave back some of the joyousness of nature, or rose to their lips in jubilant thanksgiving to the Maker of all.

There are some steps leading down from the wharf to the water's edge, where a boat is in waiting; and on these steps stand three persons—two men, and a woman holding a little child by the hand, who is looking fondly into her face, but scarcely with the sunny, careless look of childhood, for he has crept somewhat close to the woman, and his dark eyes are wistful, and even anxious; perhaps been shadowed by a sadness reflected on the faces of those near him.

The woman's hand clasps the arm of one of the men. Is he young, middle-aged or old? At a cursory glance he would

have been pronounced old. His hair is greyish, his figure bent, and his face deeply lined, the cheeks hollow, and the whole expression of feature haggard and careworn. And what though the woman's hand clasps his arm? It cannot be for support, for he is leaning somewhat heavily on a stout stick. Yet, for all this, he is not old—nay, scarcely middle-aged; but prematurely old from the torture of months and days and nights of mental suffering—suffering that has at length exhausted both mind and body, and weakened his vital powers; for the hue of his face speaks of death—death, be it near or only on its way, yet surely death; and it might be for him, though so early claimed, a welcome haven of rest.

The woman, from her slight girlish figure and fair delicate face looks scarcely a woman in years; yet she is this man's wife, and just now she has taken her hand from his arm, and, shading her eyes, is looking across the bright surface of the water at the tall and stately ship which is to bear her, her husband, and her child to a warmer clime, where, if human wishes

or human help can avail, her husband's health is to be re-established.

There is a sweet, hopeful smile on her otherwise sad face, as she stands shading her eyes, the sun streaming down on her rippling hair, and lighting it up, here and there, like burnished gold. The child still clings to her hand, as she stands for a minute motionless and silent, it may be forgetful of all around her, for the rush of many feelings that crowd about her heart.

Left to himself, the husband turns and clasps the hand of his companion.

This man is a wonderful contrast to him. He is tall and strong, with a powerful, well-knit frame, that in itself, without the flush of health stamped on face and brow, bespeaks a constitution vigorous both in mind and body. He looks a soldier every inch of him, a soldier who has fought and bled in his country's cause, for the left sleeve of his coat is empty, and fastened with a button to his waist. He has a fine, manly, though not, strictly speaking, handsome countenance. Just now his lips are firmly drawn together,

and his brow contracted, as if with some painful mental struggle.

These three are Richard Leslie, Lucy, and Joe Simmonds.

Every passionate and revengeful feeling that Joe had cherished towards Richard he had long smothered or crushed out of his heart; and he at once returned Richard's earnest clasp of the hand.

"Remember!" whispered Richard Leslie, as he looked earnestly into Joe's eyes, and then sadly at his wife and child.

And "So help me God, I will," answered Joe.

Lucy drew near, and placed her hand in Joe's.

"Dear friend; dear Joe," she said, "we will not speak of parting or farewell. Please God, we shall meet again."

Joe looked down at her as she stood with the hopeful smile on her face as she glanced at her husband; and only Joe saw the latter's mournful shake of the head.

"I have but one hand," answered Joe, as he looked wistfully in her face.

And Lucy understood him, and placed *both* hers in his.

"Say God bless you," he whispered, hoarsely.

"Indeed I will. God bless you, Joe," she replied solemnly; and at the same time the tears started, and dimmed her eyes.

And so she passed away from him; and Joe stood on the steps, and watched the boat which bore her and her husband away until their faces faded into indistinctness, and only the boat with dark forms seated in it was distinguishable. He watched it near the ship's side; he saw the forms go slowly up on to its deck; yet still he watched, and presently a small white speck fluttered at the gangway. Once—twice—thrice.

Still Joe did not move. He watched yet; it might be half an hour, or even longer, for he lost all count of time. But the white speck never fluttered again.

And with a heart dead to all sight or sound, and with a strange dimness of sight, Joe went slowly back to the hotel.

All that night he sat at the window of his room, which looked out upon the sea;

but there was no moonlight, and vainly he strained his eyes in the direction that the ship should be, longing, yet dreading the daylight.

The grey light of morning dawned, and gradually, yet faintly, objects grew distinguishable one from the other; but only a few boats dotted the space of water where the ship had been.

It was gone!

Then a blank despair fell on Joe's heart, and a wild look came into his eyes, as starting to his feet he clenched his hands, and a smothered curse rose to his lips; when suddenly Lucy's sweet, sad face came across his mental vision, and like the sound of distant music came her soft voice, whispering, "God bless you, Joe."

And the stricken man covered his face with his hands, and wept.

FINIS.

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